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COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

December 15, 2000

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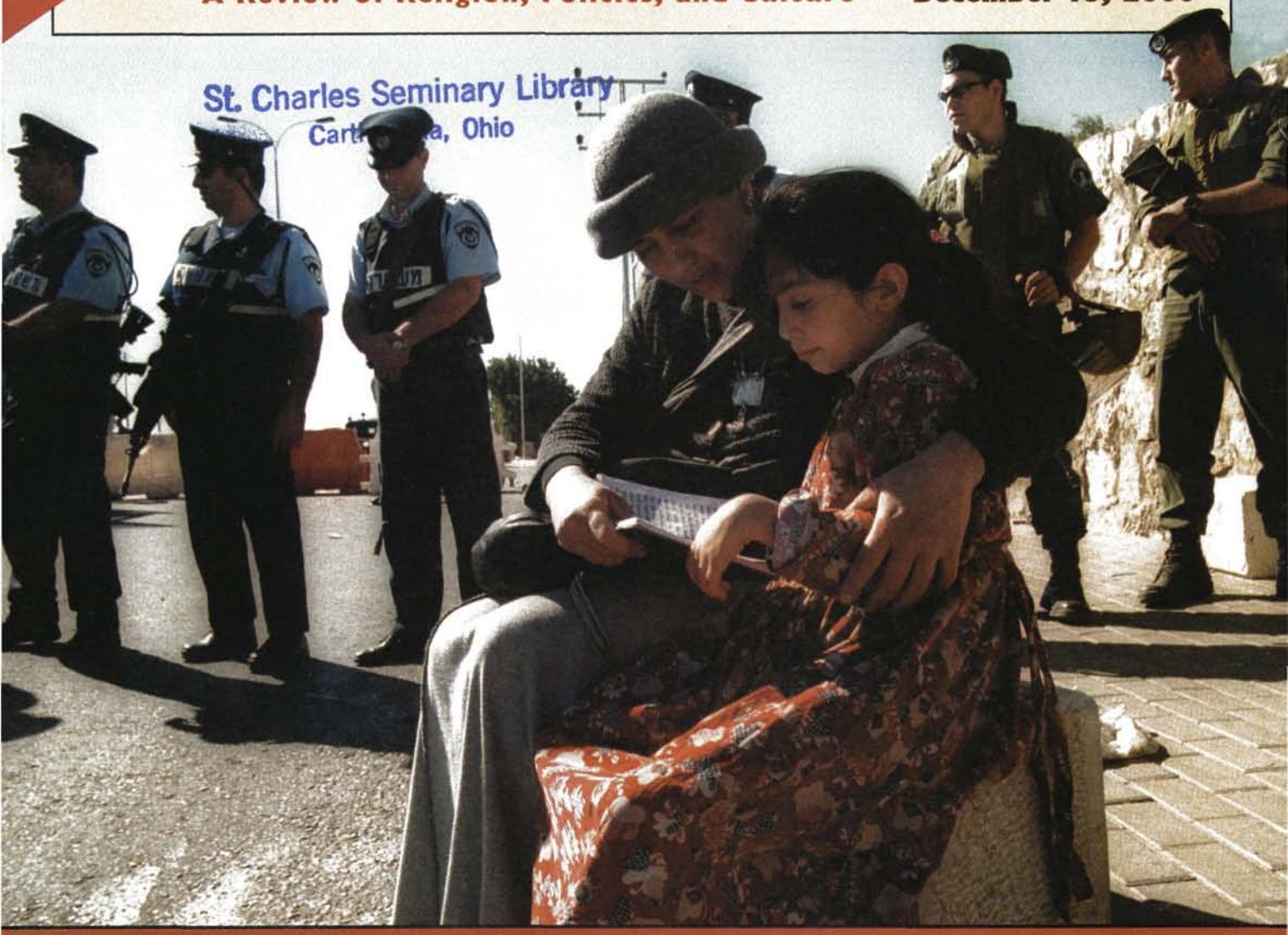

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To the Editors

Poems galore

I very much enjoyed Celia Wren's "Poetry.com" (November 17) on poetry and the Internet. However, she did leave out perhaps one of the best sites around, poems.com. This Web site provides a different published poem each day, including also a word or two about the author as well as about the book or journal in which it appeared. Despite the "dot-com" suffix, it is a noncommercial venture and there are therefore no ads.

Many poets like myself make poems.com our home page. Try it; you'll like it.

JOSEPH TIKHON MURRAY
Waterford, Conn.

Indubitably

My father and I were reading "Human Rights & Religion" (November 17) by Sidney Callahan. We came across the word "ineliminably" and looked it up in a college dictionary, online, and on a CD-ROM dictionary—we could not find it anywhere. Could you please enlighten us on the meaning of the word? Thank you.

COLLEEN PRICE
WILLIAM A. PRINCE
Norfolk, Va.

The editors enlighten: The term "ineliminably" is linked to its root's synonym, "eradicate," whose inverse variant, "ineradicable," lends insight into the instress of Sidney Callahan's intent: impossible to eliminate. We found it in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Catholic and catholic

Catholic colleges and universities in the United States have been engaged actively for more than a decade in significant activities to deepen their Catholic character and identity in a complex environment. Catholics can be pleased with the seriousness with which our institutions of higher education are serving this generation of students, assisting them in their faith development, and in engaging the Catholic intellectual tradition. As the president of one of those universities I was concerned to find a factual inaccuracy in John F. Hunt's article in the November 3 issue of *Commonweal* ("Look Before You Sign").

In his efforts to urge college trustees to consider seriously all of the implications of applying the recently approved norms of *Ex corde ecclesiae* Hunt cites Sacred Heart University's trustees as having recently declined "a hierarchical invitation to become officially Catholic." Not only has no specific invitation been addressed to us by our local ordinary, but I am perplexed to identify a context within which such an invitation would even emerge at this point in the national dialogue that is occurring on the implementation of *Ex corde*.

Sacred Heart University was founded in 1963 by Bishop Walter Curtis as the first Catholic university in the country to be led and staffed by the laity. This new development in Catholic higher education was a response to the same spirit that was to permeate Vatican II. Since that time the university has remained faithful to its Catholic identity and prides itself on having been successful in strengthening this rich heritage. The trustees as well as the faculty and staff of Sacred Heart University have had numerous opportunities in the past several years to engage in dialogue on *Ex corde*, as well as the recently issued (July 2000) applications for the United States. Along with many other Catholic colleges and universities, we are seeking to understand better both the implications of as well as the best ways to implement the apostolic constitution and the applications as part of our ongoing efforts to deepen our Catholic character and identity. Our dialogue will continue as we seek to better understand the implications of the U.S. norms, the presentation of which was, in my opinion, inaccurate and somewhat exaggerated in Hunt's article.

ANTHONY J. CERNERA
Fairfield, Conn.

The writer is president of Sacred Heart University.

The next issue of
Commonweal
will be dated
January 12, 2001

A Happy Christmas to All

The author replies:

In his letter, Anthony Cernera mistakenly asserts that I was factually inaccurate in stating that its trustees declined a hierarchical invitation to become "officially" Catholic. He is apparently under the misapprehension that a university could only become "officially" Catholic by embracing *Ex corde* and the related U.S. norms. Canons 114 and 808, which antedate *Ex corde*, demonstrate the contrary. The *New York Times* (May 12, 2000) reported, apparently based on information furnished by Dr. Cernera himself, that the Bridgeport ordinary unsuccessfully requested the trustees of the university to rewrite the bylaws and to transfer ownership to the diocese. The grant of these requests would have effectively rendered the university "officially" Catholic.

JOHN F. HUNT

Keeping balance

I am, as usual, about two or three issues behind. "Rome & Relativism" (October 20) was informative and well balanced. The open-mindedness of your editorial policy is reflected in the

(Continued on page 4)

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COMMONWEAL

December 15, 2000 / Volume CXXVII, Number 22

UPFRONT

Correspondence *'Officially' Catholic, evolving doctrine...* 2

Editorial *Votes count* 5

Et cetera *Special delivery* 6
Ruth E. Taylor 6

COLUMNISTS

Ecumenically challenged
John Garvey 7

Christmas in India
Jo McGowan 8

SHORT TAKE

Bethlehem Christmas
Joan Poulin
A glimpse beyond the violence. 9

ARTICLE

DEBT RELIEF AT THE MILLENNIUM
David Beckmann
How Bono and Senator Jesse Helms together got involved in debt relief for the third world. 12

VERDICTS

SCREEN

George W. Bush counts his votes.

How the Grinch Stole Christmas

Two Family House

Rand Richards Cooper 15

MUSIC

Faithful heir
Benjamin Ivry
Dietrich Bonhoeffer's legacy lives on in the Cleveland Orchestra. 17

BOOKS

A Bishop's Tale
by Craig E. Harline and Eddy Put
Eamon Duffy 19

One Market under God
by Thomas Frank
Kevin Mattson 20

Sovereign Virtue
by Ronald Dworkin
David McCabe 21

Death on a Friday Afternoon
by Richard John Neuhaus
The Eternal Pity
edited by Richard John Neuhaus
Brian E. Daley 23

Index to Volume CXXVII 25

THE LAST WORD

Motown Moses
Peter Feuerherd 31

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(Continued from page 2)

letters that you publish, which criticize that policy. A document, such as this, which affects our relations with other churches, requires input from members of those churches telling us how they perceive it.

Keep up the good work.

ROBERT E. TOBIN
Yonkers, N.Y.

Good judgment & bad

John T. McGreevy's article (November 17) on Judge John Noonan and Robert Burns's book review in the same issue of Charles Taylor's *A Catholic Modernity?* were enlightening and encouraging, and, hopefully, will awaken in your "The Homosexual Agenda" (October 6) writer an insight to produce another editorial more representative of evolving theological and scientific understanding.

At seventy years old, I have been a regular, proud, and grateful reader of your magazine since my high school days. For the first time, I am grieved deeply by a *Commonweal* piece which so contradicted your masterful article of some years ago by Canadian theologian Gregory Baum ["Catholic Homosexuals," February 15, 1974], an official *peritus* at Vatican II. His article not only provided a truly Catholic perspective on homosexuality, but it also demonstrated, in a very specific area, traditional doctrinal development in Catholic Christianity, so ably explained by Cardinal Newman in the nineteenth century. Evolution of dogma and doctrinal understanding are integral parts of the Catholic tradition. We are not fundamentalists!

FRANK C. ARRICALE
Bayside, N.Y.

Haigspeak

Occasioned by the November 3 civil jury's clearing of the two former Salvadoran generals of responsibility for the abduction, rape, and killing of the four American churchwomen in El Salvador on December 2, 1980, the article, "Justice Deferred" (December 1), by Robert E. White is a precise view of one of the tragic excesses of our government's involvement.

Its clarity is in stark contrast to some of the pronouncements of Alexander M. Haig Jr., former secretary of state and apologist for the Reagan administration, whose cozy explanation, without any justification, of the "gangland-style execution" of the churchwomen was that their vehicle might have attempted to run a military roadblock.

Haig, whom the famed *New York Times* columnist Russell Baker once called "The Butcher of King's English," was, however, proficient in the "D.C. dialect," which abounded in components of impersonality, obscurity, generality, and unintelligibility.

All things considered, though, Haig may yet enrich our language with an authentic eponymn: "haigiography," meaning speaking or writing for the purpose of obfuscation.

E. LEO MCMANNUS
Venice, Fla.

Dems for life vote

Thanks to Sidney Callahan for articulating so well the problem the faithful face in participating in today's dialogue on public policy ("Human Rights & Religion," November 17). "Why," she asks, "should secularists effectively establish the religion of nonreligion and declare off-limits the deepest moral commitments of the faithful?"

"I will now take questions from the floor."

Nowhere is this more evident than in the Democratic Party. It has not just happened with the candidacy of Senator Joseph Lieberman. For years, many of us have been drummed out of the party because of our opposition to abortion. We are criticized for voting on one issue, though being prolife covers many issues, including euthanasia and capital punishment. We are made to feel guilty for bringing our faith convictions into public discussions on these issues.

But this past presidential election should be a lesson to the Democratic Party. Though we may not control the party, we will not be brainwashed, we will not apologize for our faith, and we will not be silenced. And we will vote.

THEA ROSSI BARRON
Arlington, Va.

The writer is a board member of Democrats for Life.

Outlaw abortion

I agree with George Weigel's position on the connection between the future president and the soon-to-be appointed Supreme Court justices ("You Catholic? Here's How to Vote," October 20). Gore would be sure to appoint prochoice justices, whereas Bush would be more likely to choose prolife justices. The appointment of new justices is a decision that not only affects abortion, but society as a whole. As of now, abortion is legal throughout the United States. Allowing abortion to remain legal is putting the choice of life or death in the hands of society, when the decision of where life begins and ends is not ultimately up to humans. The first step in regaining moral consciousness for our world is to make abortion illegal. Bush's appointments could be a push in the right direction.

MEAGHAN PRATT
West Fargo, N.D.

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Votes count

As *Commonweal* goes to press (Tuesday, December 5) the number of variables still in play in determining the Florida presidential vote would make a calculus instructor dizzy, although by the time this issue gets to subscribers the Florida Supreme Court may well have decided who the winner is. Yesterday the U.S. Supreme Court instructed Florida's Supreme Court to clarify its reasons for permitting recounts in certain counties and extending the deadline for final certification of the Florida vote. It is unclear what impact, if any, this will have on the final vote count. At the same time, the Gore campaign continues to contest the vote already certified by Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris, trying to show that undercounted or never-counted ballots in Palm Beach, Nassau, and Miami-Dade counties should not be excluded from any final tally. That case, rejected in the lower court, is also now on appeal before the Florida high court. In separate proceedings, other Democrats are challenging irregularities concerning absentee ballots in Seminole County.

In response to these various challenges, lawyers for Governor George W. Bush have adopted a strategy of legal obstructionism, hoping to delay any court action that might result in a more complete vote count before December 12, the date by which Florida must select its electors to the Electoral College. In addition, some leaders of Florida's Republican-controlled legislature have threatened to reject any court-ordered recount that shows Al Gore the winner and to send a slate of Republican electors to Washington. If the courts and legislature send different sets of electors, the next president will be selected by a vote of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Republican concerns, if not their outrage, are easy to understand. No one should pretend that hand recounts, especially when they entail deciphering the meaning of pregnant, dimpled, or dangling "chads," are a process free of ambiguity or the danger of partisan manipulation. This whole debacle has revealed the need for vast improvements in the nation's voting procedures and mechanisms. That said, actual evidence of manipulation or fraud in the recount process has been virtually nonexistent. The work of the county canvassing boards has been an inspiring example of why democracy places its trust in the judgment of ordinary citizens. In fact, the only instance of well-documented disruption concerned a demonstration organized by Republicans that seems to have intimidated Miami-Dade officials, who subsequently abandoned the court-sanctioned recount effort.

Certainly Al Gore has pursued his own interests aggressively and with his usual abrasive self-righteousness, and Democrats have been guilty of using extreme rhetoric, especially in their attacks on Katherine Harris. But Gore's legal right—and arguably his duty—to contest an election where the margin of victory is smaller than the statistical margin of error is indisputable. Bush's behavior and tactics have been much more questionable. In essence, Bush has been determined to avoid any recount, no matter how scrupulous the procedures involved. This was evident from the moment he rejected Gore's proposal for a statewide recount. It became unmistakable in the hysterical and irresponsible reaction of the Bush campaign to the Florida Supreme Court decision allowing recounts, and in the sorry

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spectacle of Bush, the nation's likely next president, impugning that court's integrity. It reached its nadir when Bush spokesman, Montana Governor Marc Racicot, used a dispute over absentee military ballots to charge the Democrats with "going to war...against the men and women who serve in the armed forces."

Ironically, as a matter of law, Bush, who has persistently denigrated legal remedies to this conflict, may well prevail in the short term. As court hearings drag on in Florida and recounts are delayed or abandoned, time appears to have run out for Gore. Similarly, if two slates of Florida electors are sent to Washington, the result in the Republican-controlled House is a forgone conclusion. But on a more fundamental moral level, and even as a question of practical politics, Bush's strategy is likely to be self-defeating. If it becomes evident that Gore actually won the popular vote in Florida but was denied the presidency because of Republican obstruction of the process, Bush will never win the full trust of the American people. Given the opportunity to demonstrate the sort of bipartisanship he prattled on endlessly about during the campaign, Bush has shown himself to be just as eager as any Gingrich Republican to malign the motives, integrity, and patriotism of his opponents. Promising to bring "honor and dignity back to the White House," he has instead extended the practice of low cunning and self-serving demagoguery that characterizes Washington at its worst.

If Bush is convinced, as he says he is, that he won the vote in Florida, why hasn't he put his trust in the democratic system he proposes to lead to determine the winner of this election. The first principle of that system is that every vote is equal and every vote counts. At this point, George W. Bush seems to regard that principle as an arcane point of law instead of the lifeblood of democracy.

Ruth E. Taylor ■ *Commonweal* will pass another milestone with this final issue of 2000. Ruth E. Taylor, our advertising manager, has announced her retirement as of December 31. She first appeared on the masthead September 2, 1977, and has since worked steadily, cheerfully, and creatively to bring in those ads. Not only have these ads and classifieds kept our readers and ourselves abreast of the latest in books, courses, university offerings, pastoral institutes, lectures, social-choice investments, and more, but payments for the ads often kept us this side of insolvency. That was a lot for Catholics to ask of the daughter of a Lutheran minister, but Ruth never let us down.

Working from her home in Maine, Mrs. Taylor was still a lively presence in the *Commonweal* offices via phone and fax, and through her annual visit to consult about the following year's schedule and rate sheet. And then there were the last-minute calls to ask if we couldn't squeeze one more "half-page island" into the issue we were just closing. She was our representative to many advertisers and their advocate to us—the best possible placement for their ads was always insisted upon.

Her loyalty and friendship were a great gift to a "little" magazine—a gift she continues in having secured her replacement, Charles and Dan Roth of Roth Advertising. We look forward to working with them.

To Ruth Taylor, our deepest thanks.

ET CETERA

Special delivery ■ Have you been examining your mail carefully lately—not just the letters inside the envelopes, but the envelopes themselves? If not, take a look. Chances are you'll find a new experiment in canceling stamps. We've found splashed across the upper right-hand corner of first-class letters, "Happy Who-lidays from the U.S. Postal Service." Next to this greeting is an image of the Grinch's furry hand ready to drop a Christmas tree ornament.

On January 7 the cost of mailing a first-class letter will rise to $.34, and the charges for priority mail will increase by $.30 to $3.50 for the first pound, and $.75 more for the second. (It now costs $3.20 for the first two pounds of priority mail.) It has been two years since the Postal Service raised first-class rates, but when this one goes into effect, the rate will have increased by 36 percent over the past ten years. (Magazine rates will increase 9.9 percent—woe is us.)

These rate hikes are projected to bring about $2.5 billion into Postal Service coffers. According to Postal Rate Commission Chairman Ed Gleiman, the Postal Service needs about $800 million to cover increasing operating expenses. The extra $1.7 billion will provide a "sizable cushion," he says. Over the past five years, the Postal Service has made a profit of $6 billion.

And with lucrative advertising deals like the one recently struck with Universal Studios for *The Grinch*, these profits should continue. How? Why? Want to know more? Visit the Postal Service's Web site <www.usps.gov>, where, along with links to Universal's *Grinch* Web page, you'll find the explanation: "What better way to remind you that USPS can help you deliver the holiday cheer than to pair up with the fun and inspiring creation of Dr. Seuss! That's why Universal and USPS have come together to bring the Whoville spirit to your local Post Office."

Perhaps some of that Whoville spirit can clear the waters muddied by a government-run organization's willingness to allocate what is essentially public space for private interests. Couple this with the impending rate increase, and with no guarantees of service improvement, and it's enough to make you go a little, well, postal.

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JOHN GARVEY

ECUMENICALLY CHALLENGED

An Orthodox view of Dominus Iesus

The Vatican's *Dominus Iesus*, released on September 5, has caused a lot of comment, and it should. The usual complaints about media coverage of religion are justified: the document was often misrepresented in the press, and it doesn't retreat in any significant way from Vatican II. Nevertheless, it is a significant document, with a more negative than positive effect where ecumenical relations are concerned.

In writing about *Dominus Iesus* from an Orthodox point of view, let me begin by tackling a misunderstanding most Western Christians, Catholic and Protestant, have about Orthodoxy. Many standard Western histories speak of the Orthodox leaving the Roman Catholic church in 1054, following an argument over jurisdiction, a kind of prelude (from the Protestant point of view) to the Reformation when other churches left Rome. The drama, from the Western point of view, is Rome versus (or in support of) the truth.

This is, to quote *Cool Hand Luke*, a "failure to communicate." *Dominus Iesus* and its companion theological "note" on the expression "sister churches" continue the problem. Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore was quoted in a summary in *Origins* (September 14), saying that the document would be "comforting" to the Orthodox "because it notes the particular status of churches that have maintained bonds with the Catholic church through apostolic succession and their celebration of the Eucharist."

This fails to take into account the fact that the validity of Rome's own sacramental life is far from universally accepted by the Orthodox, nor is Rome's notion of what apostolic succession means. Apostolic succession has nothing to do (even in the opinion of those Orthodox who realize that Rome is connected with the apostolic church) with a connection to Roman Catholicism, which is seen by the Orthodox as having drifted from an apostolic understanding of the church. No comfort here.

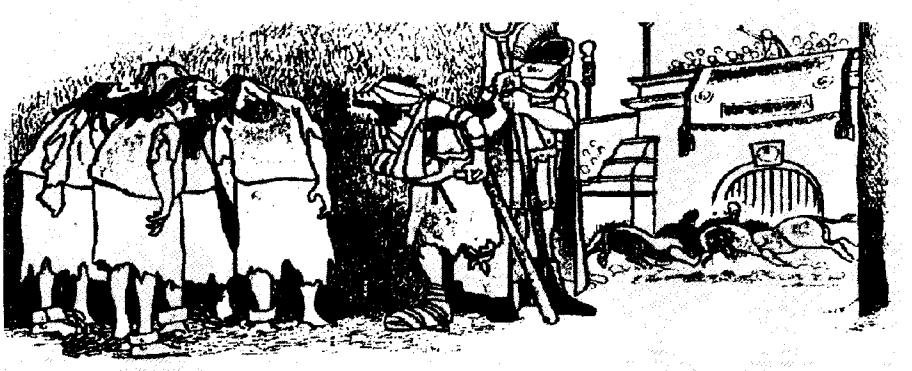
The problem with *Dominus Iesus* is its tone, and its timing. The tone is one of absolute assurance—the Catholic church has nothing to learn, and everything to teach. The timing is so near the September 3 beatification of Pius IX that it is impossible to miss the sense that the Vatican is trying to assert something about dogma and papal power that does move away from a spirit to be found in Vatican II, in the words and deeds of Paul VI, and in fact in some of the words and deeds of John Paul II. No pope ever did more to cement a wedge between Catholicism and Orthodoxy than Pius IX, not to speak of the distance he put between Rome and every other Christian communion. Although Orthodoxy could not accept Roman claims to jurisdiction over all churches, it could accept the bishop of Rome as first among equal patriarchs, if he were willing to abandon the notion of universal jurisdiction. When Pius IX introduced the definition of the pope as infallible in matters of faith and morals when he speaks *ex cathedra*—when, that is, Vatican I made the pope a bishop uniquely unlike all other bishops—there was, arguably, a move toward heresy on Rome's part.

This is not the place to repeat all of Lord Acton's anti-infallibility arguments, or the tale of the heretical pope Honorius. The point is that Catholic and Orthodox relations, never easy, were helped when popes showed a willingness to listen to, as well as exhort, churches they were not afraid to call "sister churches."

This brings up the curious note on the use of that phrase. The note asserts once more what can also be found in the documents of Vatican II: the only churches, properly so-called, are the Orthodox churches; Protestants, though certainly Christian, have lost some of what it takes to be a church. The Anglicans have been referred to (as have the Orthodox) as sister churches, but the note fears that this is misleading, since—even when the words "sister church" are used properly—it must be remembered "that the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic universal church is not sister but *mother* of all the particular churches."

I think the church the note means is the Roman Catholic one. But to whom can this be addressed? Partners in dialogue? Protestants can hardly be expected to say, "I guess we'd forgotten that." The Orthodox will be unlikely to say, "Thanks for the reminder, Mom."

The fact is that there are good things about *Dominus Iesus*, despite the tone. It worries, appropriately, about a kind of relativism that can lead to Christianity's being understood as one way to truth among many equally valid paths. While it is important for us to revere



"You Christians think you're unlucky...I'm the warm-up man!"

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what is holy in other religions, to see that the enlightenment to be found in Buddhism is not a lie but radiant and good, to have a filial respect for the Judaism without which we would not exist as Christians, it is essential for us to hold to the fact that Jesus is Lord, that salvation comes through him, that "he who has seen me has seen the Father." Commenting on *Dominus Iesus* in these pages Philip Kennedy ("Rome & Relativism," October 20) wrote, "Jesus Christ is not the full revelation of God in history, but a partial manifestation of what God may be like. Since Jesus is not the unveiling of the fullness of God in the world, other religions may have their say about God's salvific nature." This is the sort of thing Rome worries about, and here Rome isn't crazy. While the fullness of Jesus' nature may never be fathomed by our thought or dogmatic definition, it is that nature which saves us, and nothing else. To assert anything else is to move away from Christianity.

But there is a way to encounter traditions other than our own with a humility which allows us to both assert and hold on to what we believe, without qualification, without relativism, and at the same time to learn from them. There is nothing in the tone of *Dominus Iesus* to indicate that anything may be learned in any serious way from other religions, or other Christian confessions. Christians should be able to be challenged by what Buddhism says (for example) about the nature of the self, without having in any way to abandon the belief that Christ is risen.

The Vatican is right to worry about a kind of mushy ecumenism, and about relativism. *Christianity Today* (October 20) lauded the boldness of the document. But the tone of this Vatican declaration is at once smug and defensive, and the timing is lousy. Isn't there a better way, a more persuasive way, to speak to the problem? In a climate of the sort Rome rightly worries about, persuasion is essential, and insisting that Catholics are obliged, as *Dominus Iesus* does insist, to think a certain way is absolutely ineffective, and will not be persuasive even to a Catholic audience. It won't speak at all to the rest of us. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

JO McGOWAN

CHRISTMAS IN INDIA

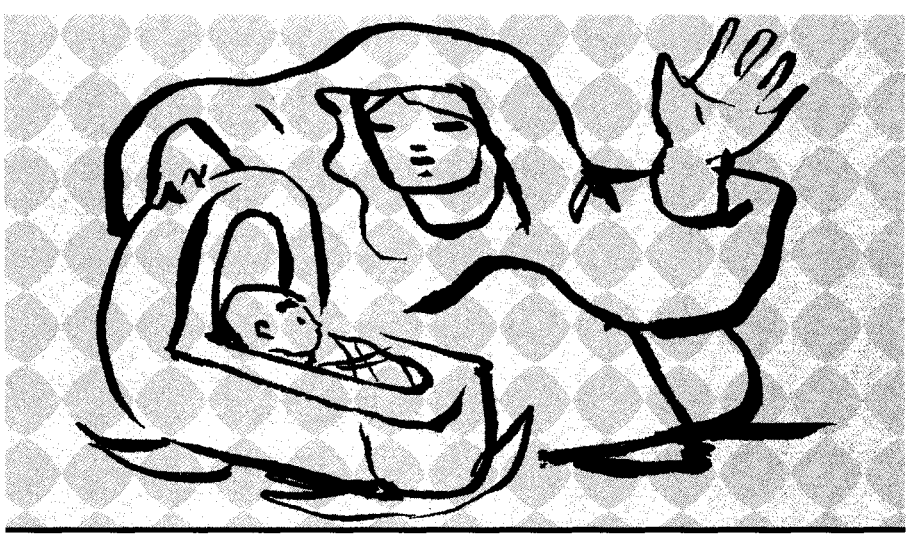
It could still happen here

Celebrating Christmas in India is interesting for the obvious reason that it is a predominantly Hindu country. Christians make up only about 1 percent of the population, and though we do our best to conduct the festival in traditional consumeristic style, outside of Mumbai and Goa where the Catholic influence is strong, Christmas is just another day. While one might then conclude that this should make it possible to concentrate on the true meaning of the feast, for me, the reverse is true.

With no pretty lights adorning the shopping districts, no wreath on any door but ours, no carols on the radio (there is no radio), I feel duty bound to create a Christmas spirit single handedly. With hardly a thought for the Word made flesh, I bake, decorate, and shop as if keeping the Grinch at bay is my sole responsibility. I start playing Christmas cassettes by mid-November and the tree stays up till the end of January. It's not easy.

But India has a way of sneaking past the tinsel, the garlands, and the special Spode coffee mugs and insisting on being recognized. It is the only place I have ever lived where the Christmas story makes sense. I mean literally. And not just the Christmas story. The whole Bible could be happening right here in our town. Outside the shop where I buy groceries there are people who work all day separating the wheat from the chaff. In the main bazaar, there is a labor market where men come and stand every morning, holding their trademark tools (a paintbrush, a hammer, a shovel), hoping to be hired for the day. Now and then I have hired one of them in the afternoon and then paid the full day's wage, feeling smug.

Just about any parable you can think of can be seen acted out here. I know several women who would turn their houses upside down in search of a lost coin. Travelers fall in with bands of thieves regularly, and a Good Samaritan is their only hope of rescue. Driving to Delhi through the farmlands of Uttar Pradesh, we look across the fields and watch the workers "bringing in the sheaves." The centurion who told Jesus he understood authority, that he himself told people to go there and they went, and that Jesus need "speak but the word" used to baffle me when I lived in democratic, egalitarian America.



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Now I could say those words myself.

So what is so difficult about believing in a young, newly married couple journeying to their native village and being unable to find room in the inn? Growing up in Massachusetts, I found it a bit farfetched that they couldn't have just gone to the next town and found a Best Western, but now I know that must have been a pretty amazing village to have an inn at all. Not to have room probably meant that all three of its rooms were full. And full no doubt meant that every available inch of floor space was already taken.

The arrival of the shepherds and the wise men would make perfect sense here, where parents still consult astrologers before deciding on a suitable marriage partner for their child. The movements of the stars, the moon, and the planets have immense importance in India, and the mysteries of the sky are seen as evidence of a Creator far beyond the scope of our understanding. Even the idea of a virgin conceiving a child would excite no special concern. A bit odd, perhaps, and probably an unnecessary complication in an otherwise straightforward story, but certainly not a stumbling block. The God who created the entire universe could surely bypass normal channels to send his Son to earth.

It is the way that people take for granted the presence of God in their lives that makes celebrating Christmas in India so right. Just about anything goes: From the virgin birth and choirs of angels to the Resurrection and Paul struck sightless by the risen Lord, the details of how God chooses to make himself manifest are simply accepted. The idea of a helpless baby, born in poverty to no one in particular, being the one to save the world is no stranger than so many other things we accept without thinking—like breathing or photosynthesis or evolution. So we accept it, pause for the birthday celebration, and get on with the harder work of living as if it were true. Which it is. □

Joan Poulin

BETHLEHEM CHRISTMAS

This year will be different

Bethlehem is only a twenty-minute drive south from Jerusalem, or a three-hour walk. The population is Palestinian: Christian and Muslim. Fifty years ago, Christians predominated, but now Muslims are the majority in Bethlehem. Here, during the last two months, violent clashes between soldiers and Palestinians have erupted almost daily, but have been localized mainly at Rachel's Tomb, in the northern part of the town. Seven Palestinians from the Bethlehem area have died, a far cry from our image of the Bethlehem of Christmas carols and crib scenes.

I know few Christians will come to the Holy Land for Christmas this year. At least 80 percent of scheduled groups canceled their pilgrimages at the beginning of October, and late last month the Palestinian Authority called off official celebrations in Manger Square. Coupled with the fact that the territories which belong to the Palestinian Authority had previously been cut off from Israel for security reasons, this will continue to diminish the Palestinians' resources.

But despite what now seems like low-level war between Israelis and Palestinians, life goes forward. I have lived in Jerusalem for thirty years and work as an Israeli-licensed tour guide. I know, better than most, that the Bethlehem of Christmas carols and brotherly love is a beautiful dream, that the reality is something very different. Still, one can catch a glimpse of that dream even in the midst of violence.

As a tour guide, I have found that arrangements for handling visitors have changed for the better since the Palestinian Authority took over Bethlehem in 1995. Previously, Manger Square, the space in front of the Basilica of the Nativity, was a parking lot filled with buses, noisy and polluting. On the south side of the square was the police station surrounded by a high barbed wire fence. Now the square has been cleared and the police station turned into a visitors' center. A huge underground parking lot down the hill from the square can accommodate all the buses that arrive. An escalator carries pilgrims partway up the steep slope. There is still quite a climb to the square, but the view of the basilica, the oldest in the Holy Land, is now unobstructed.

The Basilica of the Nativity has hardly changed since it was built by Justinian in the sixth century. It is situated over the cave where tradition places the birth of Jesus. Crusaders, in the twelfth century, added wonderful mosaics representing the ecumenical and local councils of the church and personages from the genealogies of Jesus according to Matthew and Luke. Wonderfully expressive angels adorn the high walls on both sides of the central nave, and on both sides of the sanctuary. Paintings on each column bordering the central nave depict saints who were venerated in medieval times. Today's pilgrims frown quizzically when I mention Saints Cataldus of Ireland, Onophrio with his long beard, his only covering, or Fusca.

Up until the recent troubles, there was little opportunity this great Jubilee year to admire any of this, much less the floor mosaics from the fourth century. The crowds were just too great. The mosaics were commissioned by Constantine when his mother, Helena, made her pilgrimage to the Holy Land and build the first church on the site. Justinian covered them with dirt and stones when he raised his church floor a couple of feet above the original floor, and they were only rediscovered in 1934 during the British Mandate. Now they are cleaned but can be seen only through wooden trap doors. For most of this year there were too many pilgrims to allow much of a view.

In the past year, once you had climbed to the square, you were confronted with a long line of people waiting to enter

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the basilica. Sometimes it took several hours to arrive at the church door, and you had to stand in line in the hot sun, patiently waiting to go down into the Grotto of the Nativity. The Palestinian Tourist Police were generally patient and polite.

When your turn to enter the basilica finally arrives, you must bend down before a low doorway and step over the raised threshold. The doorway is only a few feet high, to bar people riding into the church on donkeys or to prevent camels from wandering in. And you must remain alert to keep your place in line, lest other groups push in.

Eventually you reach the grotto, and go carefully down the dark steps with bated breath. First you look to the right, for the silver star under the altar. It marks the place of Jesus' birth. Then, on the left, down a few stairs to a tiny chapel, you see the place of the manger. There is barely time to glance at either, however, or to say a hasty prayer and kneel to touch the rock in the middle of the silver star, for the Greek Orthodox priest on duty, obviously bored by the whole procedure, is constantly shooing people up the exit stairs on the opposite side: "Keep moving!" "That's enough [praying]!" even "Get out!" If a Greek group happens to be in the grotto, however, the priest's tone softens considerably and they are allowed all the time they want. If you dare protest, the priest gets furious and you have to make a quick exit. Back upstairs in the basilica, the Armenians may be chanting, their priests wearing pointed hats, representing Mount Ararat (where Noah and his Ark came to rest after the flood), one of the glories of Armenia.

Whenever I try to arrive in the church early to avoid the crowds, there is an Armenian ceremony going on in the grotto. When I ask how long it will last, the usual answer is "Ten minutes." After half an hour, the chanting is finished, but then someone announces: "Cleaning time!" We sit down again as a Franciscan friar, a Greek Orthodox clergyman, and an Armenian (the three "biggies" according to the legal agreement set up by the Turkish authorities centuries ago to regulate relations among the different Christian groups in the holy places) tramp down the stairs with broom, feather duster, dustpan, and in a whirlwind of activity finish the cleaning in...ten minutes! We are right to have stayed because now the line behind us is all the way to the entrance of the church.

Traditional Christmas in North America is a cozy affair, with lights, a tree, presents, a crib scene. The donkeys and sheep in it leave no droppings, they aren't infested with lice, and it is blessedly quiet. Christmas in Bethlehem is cold and usually damp. If you manage to get a ticket for the Roman liturgy inside the Church of Saint Catherine (next to the basilica), there is always a long wait in the square, sometimes in the rain with people jostling one another and pushing. Otherwise, you can see the ceremony on huge screens set up in Manger Square.

I was astonished one year, wandering through the narrow streets in Bethlehem, to see a Santa being driven around the town, ringing a bell, followed by a crowd of shouting, jumping Palestinian children. No lineups at the Grotto of the Nativity for them! Latin Christmas is the most crowded, in contrast to Orthodox Christmas on January 7 or 8, Armenian Christmas on January 13. If you are not interested in the hassle, I suppose you can celebrate on any of these dates.

I much prefer the night walks to Bethlehem which have almost become, until now, a tradition among some pilgrims. The first time I walked to Bethlehem at Christmas was probably twenty-five years ago. We started off from Ein Karem near Jerusalem around 3 A.M., after midnight Mass and a snack. It was a lovely night, with a bright moon. There was no sound as we wound our way over the hills and down the valleys. An occasional dog barked as we crossed someone's olive grove. We arrived in Bethlehem around 6 A.M., at sunrise, appropriate for the occasion.

One year, on Christmas Eve, we joined a group that had spent a year and a half traveling across America and Europe to arrive in Bethlehem on this special day, as a protest against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The protest gathering was initiated by one of the chaplains of the American unit that had bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. By the time they arrived in Bethlehem, people from many nations had joined the original group. The highlight of the prayer service in a cave in Shepherds Field was the witness of the army chaplain and a Japanese nun who had survived the nuclear blast.

Who will walk the hills of Bethlehem this Christmas? There are always students from the different biblical schools in Jerusalem as well as individual pilgrims. There may even be a group or two, if there is a hiatus in the violence. But no end seems likely right now. □

Joan Poulin, *a native of Saskatoon, Canada, has been a tour guide in Israel for thirty years.*

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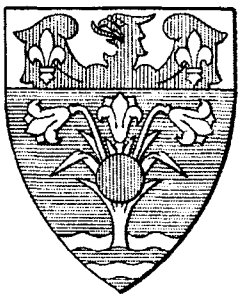
THE LITURGICAL INSTITUTE



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DEBT RELIEF AT THE MILLENNIUM

This could be the start of something big

David Beckmann

On October 2, I was seated at a table in the Cabinet Room in the West Wing of the White House. Across the table sat President Bill Clinton; at the table's end was Pat Robertson of the Christian Coalition. Congressman John Kasich (R-Ohio) and Bono, lead singer of the rock group U2, were seated near the president. Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, Rabbi David Saperstein, and other religious, congressional, and administration leaders filled the other seats.

It sounds like a comedian's opening line. A bishop, an evangelical, a rabbi, and a rock star are at the White House to meet with the president. Stop me if you've heard this one.

The surprising reality: I was witness to a remarkable coalition of leaders brought together at a "mini-summit" about a single issue: helping some of the world's poorest countries get a fresh start in the new millennium. The group had gathered to talk about debt relief, the biblical concept of jubilee in which slaves are freed and debts forgiven, applied to some of the poorest countries that struggle to meet payments at the cost of food, education, and health care for their people.

At the end of the meeting, the participants vowed to work with their constituencies and colleagues to make sure Congress funded the full amount needed for debt relief for 2001, $435 million, before the end of the session. With just a few weeks to go, it was a lofty task.

But the coalition knew it had a firm base of citizen support. The group that met with President Clinton did not gather spontaneously, nor did debt relief leap to the political forefront by chance. Behind both was a grass-roots movement inspired by the Jubilee 2000 campaign.

It all began with the African Council of Churches' call for debt forgiveness to mark the millennial jubilee. In response, in 1994 activists in England launched an international campaign, christened Jubilee 2000, to push for the cancellation of poor-country debt. Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Desmond Tutu voiced their support. Over the next few years, Jubilee 2000 grew into a worldwide movement of Catholics, Protestants, and others in more than sixty-five countries.

The Jubilee 2000 idea (backed by 20 million petition signatures worldwide) was simple: poor countries owe huge debts to the governments of rich countries and to international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The debts are so large and the interest has ballooned so incredibly that the debtor countries must curtail social programs like education and health care to service the debt. In Tanzania, for example, for every dollar spent on debt, only a quarter is spent on health care.

Much of the international debt owed by the poorest countries can never be paid—the debts are simply too great. And keeping worthless debt on the books isn't worth anything to the governments and intergovernmental agencies that made what turned out to be bad loans. The cost of writing off bad debts is minimal to a lender nation. Canceling the debt gives poor or debtor countries a fresh start and provides crucial relief to people in great need.

The support of the United States was essential to the Jubilee campaign. Every dollar the United States contributes to a debt-relief initiative leverages an additional twenty dollars from other countries. And though the United States isn't owed as much bilateral (country-to-country) debt as are other industrialized nations, the U.S. influence in World Bank and IMF operations is critical.

In the United States, Bread for the World, the U.S. Catholic Conference, major Protestant denominations, and Oxfam joined forces to develop debt-relief legislation and mount a lobbying campaign. The movement spread across the country as the group earned the support of U.S. religious leaders and churches. Now it was time to find voices in Congress.

"I invented money, but somebody borrowed it."

David Beckmann *is president of Bread for the World, an interdenominational Christian citizens' movement against hunger. A Lutheran pastor, he was formerly a World Bank economist.*

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First, we found conservative Congressman Spencer Bachus (R-Ala.). Bachus had never thought much about global hunger and poverty before early 1999 when he was made chair of the international subcommittee of the House Banking Committee. But shortly after his appointment, Bachus got a visit from some constituents, members of a Catholic parish and a Presbyterian church in his district. They had come to talk with him about debt relief.

Bachus was moved by the visit, and agreed to be a lead cosponsor of a debt-relief bill. And he carried the message one step further. He held a hearing on debt relief. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers has said that it was Bachus who convinced him that there was bipartisan support for debt relief, and that it was time for the U.S. government to act.

Summers prepared the U.S. proposal that President Clinton took to the summit of wealthy G-7 countries in Cologne, in June 1999. At that meeting, the G-7 nations adopted the U.S. plan, which, in response to the legislation that church groups were supporting, stipulated that debt relief would be used specifically to help poor people.

When the full banking committee met, Bachus, a Southern Baptist, held up a statement on debt relief from Pope John Paul II and said, "I haven't read much by Catholics before, but I don't know how any Christian could read what the pope is saying here and not agree that we need to do something about the debt of these countries. If we don't reduce this debt, people in these countries are going to be suffering for the rest of their lives—and we're going to be suffering a lot longer than that."

What had driven conservative legislators like Kasich, Hatch, and even Jesse Helms to support this initiative that seems so, well, liberal?

In a way, it seemed absurd: Bachus, a fiscal conservative, pleading with his colleagues to release whole countries from their contractual bonds to pay back loans. What had driven Bachus, and in time other conservative legislators like Kasich, Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), and even Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) to support this initiative that seems so, well...liberal?

Clearly, a moral argument is the core of the campaign. In Mozambique, half the people lack safe drinking water, two-thirds of adults are illiterate, and most children cannot go to primary school. Yet Mozambique was spending more than half its annual revenue on debt service. Those debt repayments come at the expense of needed investments in education, sanitation, and immunization.

But more than morality made debt relief palatable. For starters, much of the debt is simply unpayable. In sub-Saharan Africa, governments owe foreign creditors an average of almost $400 for every man, woman, and child—more than most Africans make in an entire year. Joao, a boy selling oranges in the interior of Mozambique, would need to sell forty-four hundred baskets of oranges to repay his share of the debt his nation acquired before he was born. A teacher in Zambia would have to pay fourteen months of her salary to fund her share of Zambia's annual debt obligation.

In addition, industrialized nations and international lending institutions bear some of the responsibility for loans that went bad. In the early 1970s, industrial-country governments and international financial institutions encouraged poor countries to borrow heavily. Many developing countries, following the dominant development theories of that era, put great hope in grand government schemes and grabbed the opportunity such easy money presented. Some loans were wasted on projects that did not work. Some borrowed money was pocketed by corrupt officials. Some loans financed cold-war military expenses.

Western banks were glutted with revenues from oil-producing countries as oil prices rose. Commercial banks sometimes lent to poor countries that were barely creditworthy. When global recession hit in the late 1970s, demand for exports dropped and prices for agriculture and minerals plunged. Countries had come to rely on continued borrowing, but commercial interest rates skyrocketed and commercial banks curtailed lending. Basically, many debtor countries were going bankrupt. But countries can't declare bankruptcy; their only choice is to find a way to repay the unpayable loans.

Debt relief isn't a new concept. Over the last twenty years, banks and creditor governments have tried to address the debt problem by rescheduling loans and, in some cases, providing limited debt relief. But as interest charges were added to rescheduled loans, the debt of many of the world's poorest countries continued to swell. In 1986, the World Bank predicted that by 1995 sub-Saharan Africa would owe $29 billion. As it turned out, by 1995, sub-Saharan Africa owed seven times that much.

In addition, canceling unpayable debt makes economic sense. Reducing debt payments should stimulate economic growth and make poor countries more attractive to foreign investors.

How do we know debt relief will be used in responsible and helpful ways? U.S. legislation and the internationally accepted plan both stipulate that countries with gross violations of human rights, blatant drug trafficking, or excessive military expenditures are not eligible. A government would need to demonstrate sound economic management.

Most important, the IMF and the World Bank are required to work together with each poor-country government—and its local citizens and nongovernmental organizations—to develop a national poverty-reduction strategy. Funds freed up by debt relief are directed to basic schooling, health care, and poverty reduction.

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Anchored in support from religious groups and congressional leaders, the Jubilee proposal continued to gain momentum throughout 1999. At the annual meetings of the World Bank and the IMF that September, the nations of the world agreed on the specifics of the plan to cancel $90 billion in poor-country debt. During the meetings, Clinton challenged other creditor governments with a surprise announcement that the United States would cancel 100 percent of the bilateral debt owed it by poor countries. He then sent a request to Congress for $920 million over four years to cover the U.S. portion of the international initiative.

Despite bipartisan support, funding debt relief was still an uphill battle. With less than two months left in the congressional season, Jubilee campaigners pulled out all the stops. Bono flew to Washington for a quick press conference and some Capitol Hill wrangling in early November. Evangelical leader Billy Graham voiced his support for the campaign. Throughout the year, more than one hundred fifty thousand letters from concerned citizens flowed into congressional offices.

At the end of its 1999 session, Congress appropriated $110 million to write off debts that poor countries owe to the United States and freed up $2.1 billion in IMF resources to reduce the debts owed to the IMF. Republican leaders of Congress and Treasury Secretary Summers negotiated nineteen pages of policy agreements designed to make sure that debt relief really helps poor people and that the IMF becomes more transparent and accountable.

The Jubilee campaign proclaimed victory, if only the first step. It had pulled an obscure biblical concept into the arena of international finance. The *Wall Street Journal* called Jubilee 2000 a "grassroots campaign reminiscent of the drive against South African apartheid."

But 2000, the supposed millennial Jubilee year, brought new challenges. For the debt-relief initiative to move forward, Congress and the president had to agree to appropriate $435 million—four times the 1999 amount—and approve the release of the remaining $550 million from IMF gold sales to finance the plan. Other countries would provide funding too, but the U.S. contributions were necessary to keep the international initiative on track. If the United States fell into arrears, other creditor countries would reduce support as well.

Politics makes strange bedfellows. Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition, came out in favor of the initiative. In September, Bono returned to Washington, this time to meet with Jesse Helms—a legislator not known as an enthusiast of foreign aid. Talking about debt relief with the rock star reportedly brought tears to Helms's eyes. "If I can find some way that the Lord would show me how to really help these people, I'd quit the Senate and try to do it. I told Bono that. He is working hard and I'm going to try to help him the best I can," Helms said after the meeting.

Organized letter-writing campaigns in 2000 produced an additional hundred thousand letters to Congress. Bipartisan support for the full funding of debt relief grew. At the October White House debt summit, Bono said it best: Debt relief is "the only idea that's big enough to fill the shoes of this millennium year. I'm wondering and I'm asking people, what will we remember about the millennium year, this religious festival? Is it just going to be the good times, the boom time for America? Or is there an idea that perhaps could change the world a little bit?"

In the final days before Congress recessed for the national elections, we were still unsure what debt-relief funding Congress would agree to. The Senate Banking Committee has jurisdiction over U.S. policy toward the IMF, and Phil Gramm (R-Tex.), chair of the committee, wanted to impose yet more stringent requirements on countries applying for debt relief. Jubilee campaigners, including many church folks from Texas, lobbied Gramm. Negotiations between the administration and congressional leaders took place behind closed doors. In the meantime, we prayed.

On October 25, 2000, both the House and Senate approved the entire $435 million and $550 million in IMF funds. The changes Gramm wanted were not included in the bill. Debt relief had won again.

For the Jubilee campaigners in the poor countries, the work is just beginning. Groups are pushing from below for meaningful public discussion and for investments that will really benefit poor people. Fortunately, IMF and the World Bank are now mandated to insist on democratic discussion and poverty-reduction plans. In Bolivia, in response to this opportunity, the Catholic church convened meetings around the country to give people from low-income communities a chance to articulate their views about the country's poverty-reduction strategy.

In Uganda, money freed up by debt relief is being used to allow more children to go to school. After public discussions revealed that more than half of the money the government disbursed for primary schools never reached them, officials agreed to radio and newspaper announcements when money is disbursed. As a result, the World Bank estimates that losses to corruption have dropped from more than 50 percent to less than 10 percent.

In the global north, Bread for the World and other church groups will continue to press the U.S. Treasury, the IMF, and the World Bank to live up to the bold policies they have adopted. Over the next two years, Congress must appropriate another $375 million to fulfill the total U.S. commitment of $920 million over four years.

Still, the debt-relief victory is reason to celebrate. Perhaps it is also the start of something bigger. Maybe we can build this diverse, bipartisan coalition into a sustained constituency to reduce hunger and poverty around the world. The Jubilee movement has shown that morality can be good economic policy, and that people of faith can win significant changes in U.S. policy. Concerned citizens can even change the rules of the global economy. □

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Rand Richards Cooper

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS

'How the Grinch Stole Christmas' & 'Two Family House'

If you're under forty, chances are you grew up loving Theodore Geisel, a.k.a. Dr. Seuss, and his holiday fable, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Year after year the animated 1966 TV movie charmed us with the happy innocence of Whoville, with inspired nonsense lyrics ("Your brain is full of spiders, you've got garlic in your soul, Mister Griiiiinch—I wouldn't touch you with a thirty-nine-and-a-half-foot pole!"), and best of all, with the wicked Grinch himself, that anti-Santa, snapping up every last crumb and tree ornament on his midnight raid. For millions of Americans, Christmas wasn't Christmas without the Grinch deviously scheming to abscond with it. Now, decades later, here comes a ballyhooed big-screen version—with Jim Carrey in the title role, no less—and some parents are all but dragging their kids to the theater to see it.

Alas, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is a colossal bust. Ron Howard's movie goes wrong from the start, when we float down to Whoville, only to find its denizens fitted out with grotesque, piglike snouts. Wait a sec, you mean the Whos are ugly? Whoville itself (assembled on the largest set ever built at Universal) is all tilting minarets and arched bridges, suggesting the curvy, eccentric modernism of a Gaudi or Hundertwasser. It's supposed to be quaint and fantastical, but instead feels suffocatingly cluttered—especially with the Whos racing about in a frenzy of pre-Christmas buying. That's right, the Whos are greedy, too. Apparently neither Howard nor his screenwriters saw that rewriting the Whos as rampaging materialists, far from deepening the fable's moral, would make hash of it. If the Whos have lost their way, how can they help the Grinch find his?

As for the Grinch himself, Carrey transforms Seuss's brooding curmudgeon into a high-octane standup comic. He mugs and winks for the camera, doing voices from Richard Nixon to RuPaul, riffing randomly (on the *Hindenburg* disaster, for instance, as he torches a Christmas tree and wails, "Oh, the Whomanity!"). "Kids today," he simpers when Cindy Lou Who (Taylor Momsen) fails to be frightened by him, "they're so desensitized by television!" It's manic Jim Carrey shtick; but do we really want a Grinch who says "Cheer up dude, it's Christmas!" or, when stuck in a chimney, "This blasted water weight goes right to my hips!"?

How the Grinch Stole Christmas is way too much—the performances, the writing, the sets and costumes; the sheer $130 million bulk of the thing. Universal's production notes list a crew of sixty make-up artists, seventy computer and visual-effects people, and on and on. No wonder the film feels overdone. Indeed, Howard has created a near-perfect inversion of Seuss's message: all the money in the world, and nary a speck of Christmas magic to be found anywhere.

The old cartoon movie, like the original tale itself, proceeded with sublime efficiency (remember the Christmas tree that folded up like an umbrella?), keeping dialogue and design to a minimum in order to fix our attention on the essential: the state of the Grinch's heart. Howard and his screenwriters get lost in their outsized film, then grope for whatever might pull them out—a sack race in Whoville that turns into *Chariots of Fire*, or a tedious subplot that sends Cindy Lou Who on the trail of the Grinch's past, revealing the childhood abuses that drove him to exile in the cold crags above Whoville. In 1966 we didn't need an hour of psychological exposition to explain why a miser hated Christmas. Back then it was enough to know that his heart was two sizes too small.

In one sense, none of this matters, of course. Kids find Carrey's manic hijinks a hoot, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* grossed $55 million on its first weekend. Leaving the theater, I couldn't but assign this juiced-up and pointlessly opulent Christmas film, with its week-before-Thanksgiving opening date, to the vast plot to keep us revved for holiday buying all year round. If you find this all too Grinch-like of me, just ask yourself, does the new Grinch film stand a chance of being one people will watch year in and year out?

I wouldn't touch that bet with a thirty-nine-and-a-half-foot pole.

Debating the recount

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Staten Island's canvassing board convenes

Those looking for more authentic Christmas uplift should seek out Raymond De Felitta's *Two Family House*, another tale of someone whose heart turns out to be bigger than he knows. Buddy Visalo (Michael Rispoli) is a dreamer caught in a prosaic time and place—a young World War II vet in 1950s Staten Island who fantasizes about being a nightclub singer. Back in the service Buddy sang at a show where Arthur Godfrey was present, and Godfrey's chance compliment stoked his fantasy. After the war, his no-nonsense fiancée, Estelle (Katherine Narducci), made discarding his silly dreams a condition of having her, and Buddy hunkered down to the eight-to-six in a machine shop. Now he sits at home watching Julius LaRosa on TV and saying, "That coulda been me."

Wisely, De Felitta never suggests that Buddy is talented enough to be the next Mel Tormé. Singing is a metaphor for a man struggling toward the recognition that his life lacks music. Dutifully Buddy labors away, plotting schemes of escape (as a pizza maker, later a house painter) that always fall apart. Finally he buys a dilapidated two-family house, dreaming of opening a club in the bottom floor. And guess who's going to be the opening act.

Problems, problems. The upstairs turns out to be occupied by a drunk named O'Neary (a brief but brilliant performance by Kevin Conway) and his young, extremely pregnant wife, Mary. Goaded by Estelle, Buddy tries to evict the couple, and in the ensuing fracas, Mary gives birth. When the newborn's paternity—the child is black—sparks a local scandal, the husband deserts, and Buddy, pushed again by Estelle, kicks out mother and child. Mary moves into a rundown hotel frequented by prostitutes, as the neighborhood smugly nods. But it doesn't sit right with Buddy. Hesitantly, secretly, he steps in to help.

The charm of *Two Family House* lies in watching Buddy's conscience surface through the muck of his prejudices, riding a dim, deep intuition that he and the outcast have something in common. "Every man has at least one moment of total selflessness in this life," says the film's voiced-over narrator; but it's more complicated than that. Selflessness is what Buddy already has, married to a woman who despises his dreams. What he needs is more like finding himself, if only he can admit it. Conscience and loneliness together draw him to Mary. "What do you want?" she asks suspiciously, when Buddy keeps appearing at her door. "I just want to talk to someone," he says at last, and soon it all comes pouring out.

Once Buddy gets a taste of intimacy, we know—better than he does—that he'll be back for more. (It doesn't hurt that Kelly MacDonald, the Irish actress who plays Mary, is achingly beautiful.) He doesn't understand that his wife is poison, or that his life is a prison from which a woman who says "sing it for me" when he starts humming along to a melody on the radio has the power to spring him. All he knows is that he has a feeling. But what to do about it? Buddy may sing the romantic standards, but they aren't of his world. The land of crooners floats somewhere in the ether of romance, in movies Buddy surely doesn't go to and in novels he surely doesn't read; it's where we are. Buddy's working-class Italian-American world is about anything but romance. It's about living in your in-laws' house. It's the boys at the bar, the wife and her gossiping girlfriends, the moral scrutiny of family and church. It's the group instead of the two.

Two Family House is a romance, but De Felitta keeps enough bittersweetness in the mix to leave you unsure—and nervous—about how things will end. Discovering Buddy's infidelity, Estelle uses her outrage to crush his dreams once and for all. "You did this because you think you're a big shot," she fulminates. "You think you're somebody you aren't." Through his guilt, Buddy gropes to articulate his unhappiness. The moment hangs in the balance, and you realize how deftly De Felitta has steered his story between comedy and tragedy.

Follow your dream: it's a hackneyed phrase in America, and to make it fresh requires a sense not only of how dreams can redeem, but what they cost as well. Where Buddy comes from, it's one thing to cheat on your wife and then come crawling back; but to actually bail out on a marriage, to ditch your wife for a feeling—and with a notorious woman—means throwing your life away. We can't help rooting for Buddy to know his own heart, but De Felitta never lets us forget how much easier it is for us to say this than it is for Buddy to do it.

Both Michael Rispoli and Katherine Narducci appear in HBO's smash hit series, "The Sopranos," and *Two Family House* copies that show's trick of giving broad ethnic stereotypes depth, creating a kind of inarticulate eloquence. Radiating the warmth and humor of autobiography (De Felitta based it on the life of a wayward uncle), *Two Family House* won the audience award this year at Sundance, and it's easy to see why. Get past the criminally forgettable title and you'll be rewarded with one of this season's most delightful small-movie treats. □

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Benjamin Ivry

FAITHFUL HEIR

Conductor Christoph von Dohnanyi

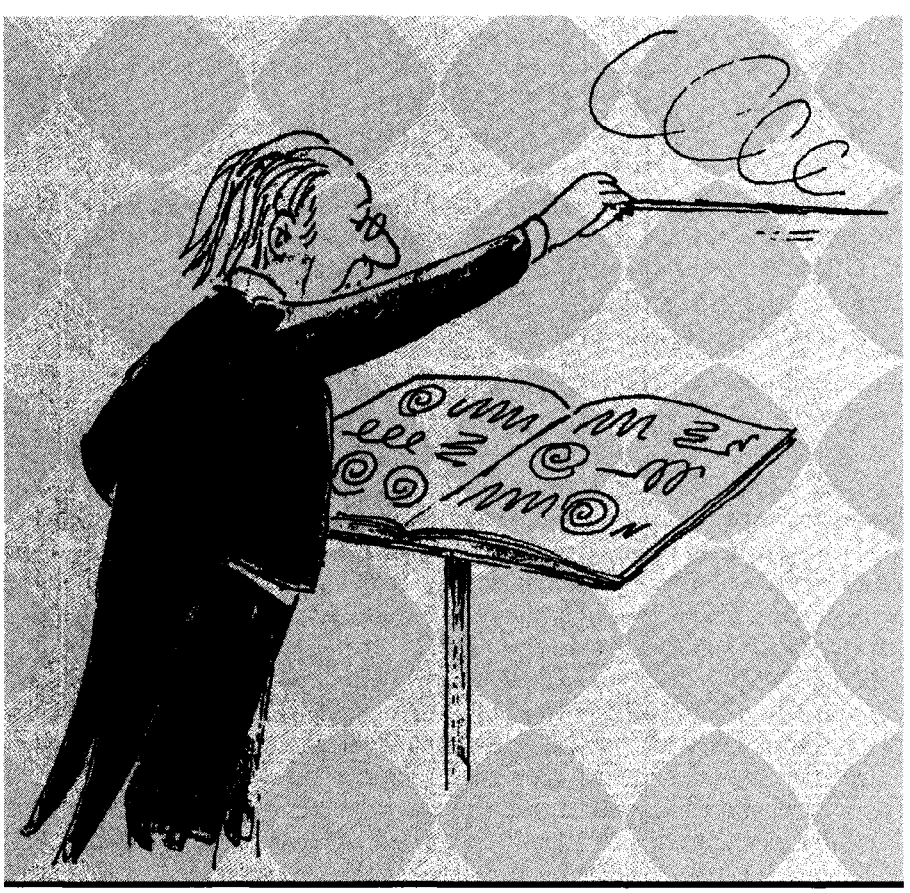
When debates are heard about music and morality, the focus is usually on how some musicians, like conductors Herbert von Karajan and Wilhelm Furtwangler, collaborated with the Nazi regime and yet managed to produce beautiful recordings while doing so. The spiritual depth of symphonic performances might not depend entirely on a maestro's personal virtues, but there are instances where that is at least partly the case. Donald Rosenberg's new book, *The Cleveland Orchestra Story* (Gray & Co., $40, 752 pp.), brings one such example to light.

Christoph von Dohnanyi (b. 1929), who has led the Cleveland Orchestra for nearly twenty years, is a conductor of the highest skills, acclaimed for his performances of music by Bartok, Richard Strauss, and Brahms. Scheduled to leave his job in Cleveland in 2002, Dohnanyi has created a legacy of recordings that are still generally underappreciated, if sales are any indication (Decca canceled his rendition of Wagner's *Ring* midway when profits proved disappointing). But certain indisputable recorded high points, like a Bruckner Sixth Symphony (Decca) or Schumann's Third Symphony (Decca) remain. Dohnanyi is among those conductors who place the music and its emotional message first; many others, who claim this is their goal, are in fact grandstanding for public approval, drawing attention to themselves at every measure. While taking advantage of the Cleveland Orchestra's renowned string and brass sections, Dohnanyi's interpretations retain pliancy and verve, and never bog down in podium egomania. Nor do they suggest a rigidly controlled universe, in which the conductor has laid down the law so vehemently that the musicians, and thenceforth the music, dare not breathe.

Hard work and a lifetime of preparation have apparently resulted in a lack of performance nerves that can mar other conductors' work. I recall arriving at Paris' Chatelet Theatre a few years ago just five minutes before a concert performance of Strauss's massive allegorical opera *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*. Only just ahead of me in entering the theater from a mind-clearing stroll was the evening's conductor, Dohnanyi, who had obviously prepared the performance so well that he could afford the luxury of a brief last-minute ramble in central Paris. In that situation, most other conductors would have been sweating bullets in their dressing rooms.

These musical and human virtues are audible in Dohnanyi's work, but can their source be identified, at least in part? In his history, Rosenberg reminds us that Dohnanyi also played a unique historical role a half-century ago as the beloved nephew of Protestant theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–45). Dohnanyi's father Hans, and his uncles Klaus and Dietrich, were all active in the anti-Hitler resistance in wartime Germany, and all were imprisoned and executed near the war's end. Young Christoph, busy with music lessons, wrote faithfully to Bonhoeffer in prison, as his uncle marveled in a letter to Hans von Dohnanyi: "A letter from Christoph has just come. It's surprising how he keeps thinking of writing. What a view of life a fourteen-year-old must get when he has to write to his father and godfather in prison for months on end. He cannot have many illusions about the world now; I suppose all these happenings must mean the end of his childhood."

Dohnanyi's childhood may have ended with the murder of his family, but his creative growth survived. Rosenberg implies that this may be because the family undertook music-making as a positive act against evil. The Bon-



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DOMINICAN UNIVERSITY
DEAN
ROSARY COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

Dominican University invites nominations and applications for the position of Dean of the Rosary College of Arts & Sciences; the appointment is effective in the summer of 2001.

The Rosary College of Arts & Sciences is composed of twelve academic departments with sixty full-time and forty-seven part-time faculty offering forty-nine undergraduate majors. The college is noted for its dedication to the liberal arts, its interdisciplinary core curriculum, and its several strong study abroad programs.

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The University seeks a candidate with the following qualifications:

- A deep commitment to the liberal arts and a record of participation in liberal arts education
- An acquaintance with the national dialogue about the liberal arts
- A vision for the liberal arts in the twenty-first century at a Dominican institution that values excellent teaching, service, and scholarship
- A vision of the role of Catholic faith in contemporary university education and scholarship
- Academic and scholarly credentials that merit the respect of the academic community and are sufficient to earn appointment to an academic department at a senior rank
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Review of applications will begin January 1, 2001, and will continue until the position is filled. Minority candidates are especially encouraged to apply.

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hoeffers, a bourgeois Berlin family, enjoyed at-home evenings of chamber music and choral singing. Immediately after Bonhoeffer was jailed, his family sent him a music score of Bach cantatas. After thanking his aunt for the gift, Bonhoeffer wrote, "I often think of that lovely song by Hugo Wolf which we sang so often lately, 'Joy and suffering come by night, and then depart at your bidding to tell the Lord how you experienced them.'"

In his letters, which are modern spiritual classics, Bonhoeffer often likens human experience to music, as when he compares the fragmentary nature of life to Bach's unfinished *Art of Fugue*: "If our life could be the weakest reflection of such a fragment, if in itself only for a while the ever-more diverse themes could harmonize so that we might maintain a great counterpoint from beginning to end, so that all we need do is sing the chorale, 'I advance to Your throne,' then we would no longer complain about our fragmentary life, but rejoice in it." Bonhoeffer also insisted on the importance of humor, what he called *hilaritas*, in Mozart, Wolf, and other creative artists, "which I feel is an expression of the confidence they have in their works, of their bravery, and the challenge they throw out to the world...."

This assimilation of music as a fundamental source of courage and inspiration must have affected young Christoph. His development as a musician set him distinctly apart from other Cleveland Orchestra conductors, like the notorious George Szell, a "nasty and unforgiving man" known to his musicians as "Doctor Cyclops." In a chapter titled "Music and Morality," we learn how Szell's colleagues referred to him as "a cold, cold sonofabitch" and called his reign on the Cleveland podium "the Third Reich," a considerable irony as Szell himself was a refugee from Nazi-occupied Europe.

Dohnanyi, whose approach to music-making differs mightily from this precedent, has been constantly reminded of his identity and historical role by Bonhoeffer's continued presence in the news. Recently, the Berlin public prosecutor decided to have the 1945 death sentence against Bonhoeffer belatedly revoked. In a phone conversation from his Cleveland office, Dohnanyi explains, "Of course my father and Bonhoeffer were proud to be illegal. They were obliged to be illegal against Hitler, who was the head of state at the time. What's most vital is that Bonhoeffer's thoughts have spread out as one of the most important theologians. I'm very proud to be his nephew. He was my favorite uncle of all, and my godfather. He was a wonderful man."

Anyone who reads about Bonhoeffer, who was hanged in a German prison on April 9, 1945, after a summary trial, can only agree. And those who believe in the possibility of music as wisdom literature may be reassured by this uncle-and-nephew team whose lives were so creatively and thoughtfully involved with music. □

Benjamin Ivry *is author of biographies of Ravel (Welcome Rain), Poulenc (Phaidon), and Rimbaud (Absolute Press). His poetry collection,* Paradise for the Portuguese Queen, *was published by Orchises Press.*

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Tough bishop fights curia & Calvin

A Bishop's Tale
Mathias Hovius among His Flock in Seventeenth-Century Flanders
Craig E. Harline and Eddy Put
Yale University Press, $27.95, 384 pp.

Eamon Duffy

Mathias Hovius was the bishop responsible for the reimposition of Catholicism in the Archdiocese of Mechelen in the Spanish Netherlands between 1596 and 1620. The cathedral and the diocese had been devastated by Calvinist revolution in April 1580, its shrines and images destroyed, its clergy exiled or butchered. Hovius himself, then a mere canon, had fled the region after an ignominious spell of hiding in a capacious wardrobe. But he survived, and as archbishop under the restored rule of Archdukes Albert and Isabella, he had the task of repelling Protestantism, renewing discipline among priests and religious, regulating popular piety, ensuring the decent performance of the liturgy, the recruitment of seminarians, the funding of new ministries, the disciplining of backsliders among laity and clergy, and, not least, of strengthening the resolve of foot-dragging state officials to enforce the practice and profession of Catholicism in the region.

A methodical man, Hovius kept a journal in which he made brief entries of all his doings. It survives, amidst mountains of other documentation, in the diocesan archives. These documents were coaxed out of the bulldog vigilance of the formidable archdiocesan archivist of Mechelen, Father Constant Van de Wiel, by Craig Harline, an American, and Eddy Put, a Belgian, over a period of more than ten years, and this delightful book is the result.

A Bishop's Tale is not, it must be said, for the overprecise. Harline and Put want to reach a nonacademic audience, and their book often reads more like popular fiction than sober church history. Every chapter opens with the colorful evocation of a particular scene, with plenty of contemporary detail to flesh out the text. Where the sources do not provide enough detail, they speculate or invent: professional historians will wince at some of the breezy inferences made on small evidence. Many of the chapters focus on a single issue, but some have only an artificial unity, as a ragbag of disparate items are tossed together for lack of anywhere better to put them (for example, the chapter headed "Table-talk"). The style is racy, larded with slang: troublesome councils of priests are "pesky," guests, "belly up" to the archbishop's table. Yet when all that has been said, I know of no other book which conveys so vividly and, in the end, so reliably, the sheer range and rigor of the Northern European Counter-Reformation in its most militant phase.

In his long episcopate, Hovius had to contend with almost every problem confronting the bishops of post-Tridentine Europe, and Harline and Put, for all their populist approach, have a sure historical instinct which enables them to throw a flood of light on those problems. The see was badly endowed and impoverished by Calvinist confiscations and destructions (on this issue the authors are unfair, incidentally, to one of Hovius's nominated predecessors, the Englishman Cardinal William Allen, whom they portray as playing hard-to-get over his appointment: Allen very much wanted the see, but was simply too poor in the end to accept it). Hovius had to finance himself from the revenues of the Abbey of Affligen, annexed to the see for the purpose. Predictably, the monks fought him tooth and nail; ruthlessly, the archbishop, who was their titular abbot, exiled them and broke their resistance.

But finance was the least of his troubles. The canons of the thirteen collegiate churches of his diocese were idle, or quarrelsome, or ignorant, or drunken, or lecherous, or all of the above; in his struggles to reform them, he had to invoke the help of the papal nuncio. But there is no such thing as a free nuncio. The Baroque-era

"We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way."

–St. Francis of Assisi

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curia was morbidly suspicious of the powers of local bishops (*so* unlike, in this regard, its modern-day successor), and Hovius found himself facing two ways, preserving his authority against local rebels and fighting off the attempted interference of an overweening papacy. A key figure here was the unscrupulous careerist Henri Costerius, a protonotary apostolic eager for a bishopric, who as a Borghese client, had powerful friends in Rome. Monsignor Costerius presented himself as the voice and eyes of Rome within the diocese, maligning the archbishop to eager ears, locally or in the Vatican, and parading bogus miracles worked by the relics he had brought from the catacombs. In the end, the archbishop had him clapped in jail.

Many of the issues confronting Hovius concerned the religion of the people: regulating the popular pilgrimage to Our Lady of the Sharp, strategically and symbolically sited on the front line between the Catholic and Calvinist forces. The archbishop chopped down the sacred oak tree which was a dubious focus of local cult, and had the wood made into edifying statues. We watch him enforcing Sabbatarianism on a population half paganized by years of religious disorder, or turning a blind eye to the dubious observances at the heart-wrenching Marian shrine where bereaved mothers brought still-born babies in the hope that they would be resurrected long enough to be baptized. We see Hovius trying to lock up wandering nuns behind convent walls, resolving claims of financial sharp practice by death-bed nurses, trying to recover a promising seminarian from the Jesuit novitiate, sorting out the maladministration of a hospital, coercing his clergy into reform synods.

And there is darkness as well as light in the story: one of the most moving and horrifying chapters tells of the terrible death of Anna Utenhove, the last Protestant to be executed in the Netherlands, buried alive at the very beginning of Hovius's episcopate for her refusal to accept the doctrine of the Real Presence.

All this material is handled with consistent verve and vividness: for those interested in following up the sources, everything is properly if discretely documented, but the learning is carried lightly. I read this book on a series of gruesome long-haul plane flights, and was sorry when I turned the last page. Few works of church history could hold my attention in such inauspicious circumstances. This book deserves the widest possible readership. □

Eamon Duffy *is the author of* The Stripping of the Altars *and* Saints and Sinners *(both Yale University Press).*

CONSUMERISM AS A CON JOB

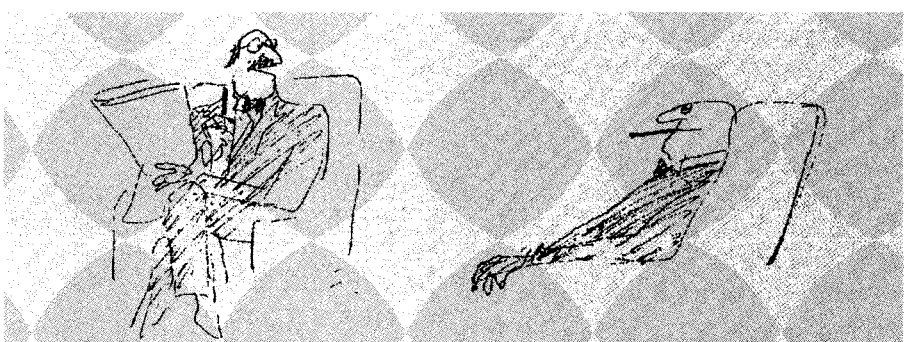
One Market under God
Extreme Capitalism, Market Populism, and the End of Economic Democracy
Thomas Frank
Doubleday, $26, 414 pp.

Kevin Mattson

Thomas Frank might just be this generation's Thorstein Veblen. As editor of *The Baffler*, a small magazine of cultural criticism, he has renewed writing that is clear, fun to read, and deadly serious. In his newest book, he takes on the 1990s the way previous social critics dissected the decadence of the 1920s. He lambastes a peculiar 1990s fetish of "market populism"—the idea that consumerism equals democracy and that criticism of the market's inequalities is elitist. Frank points to the punditocracy's celebration of Bill Gates as a great American hero. When the antitrust suit befell Gates, *Time* pleaded, "cut a deal and let's get back to making bucks." At the same time, another journalist complained that "hostility to the market" or "antimarket snobbery" only came from aristocrats and artists. This glorification of the wealthy and market inequalities has become the new ideology of global capitalism. In Frank, it has met its critic.

To get a sense of our new *weltanschauung*, Frank has plodded through the writings of contemporary management theorists like Tom Peters and the editors at *Fast Company*, a slick business and "lifestyle" magazine. Frank uncovers the death of Frederick Taylor's early twentieth-century idea that workers should be painstakingly managed through stop-watch regimentation and hierarchy. Instead, management now means liberation. Witness Tom Peters's call to "blast the violent winds of the marketplace into every nook and cranny in the firm." Or his aphorism that "Destruction is cool!" No regularity here, no search for automatons in the workplace; instead, we have flexibility and lightning-paced change. Workers can dress casually but should expect no job security.

Frank also examines the advertising industry, recognizing a shift from the



"As capitalists we are owners of capital. It's as simple as that."

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supposedly drab conformity of the 1950s. Today, corporate advertisers are enthusiastic about rebellion and multiculturalism—the racial and ethnic diversity promoted by Benetton and Cisco Systems and Ameritrade's depiction of punk kids advising their bosses on day trading. As if this veneer of rebellious diversity wasn't phony enough, Frank places alongside it the work of postmodern academics pursuing "cultural studies." With their belief in consumer "agency" and resistance, these tenured radicals appear little more than rear-guard troops for business culture.

So how did we get to the point where intellectuals genuflect and capitalism lacks critics? Frank revisits the "backlash" of 1968, when Nixon and Wallace led the "hardhats" against liberal elites. Then he fast-forwards to the "culture wars" of the 1980s and 1990s (unfortunately, Frank leaves out conflicts over abortion and affirmative action, and these oversights oversimplify his argument). While Republicans appealed "to class anger" around "cultural issues," Frank argues, "when economic matters came up the culture-war compound grew unstable very quickly." Nonetheless, the 1990s witnessed the culture wars' ironic triumph: Day traders and business elites were turned into populist heroes, and Bill Gates replaced the hardhats.

This is a powerful argument. It explains how George W. Bush can wage class war on behalf of the privatization of Social Security and how Milwaukee's business elites can build coalitions with poor African Americans for public school vouchers. This last point needs highlighting, though, for it points to a weakness in Frank's arguments. Frank never explains what the relation is between elite management theorists and the everyday realities of average citizens. Unfortunately, there really were Reagan Democrats who voted into office a president who quickly smashed the air-traffic controllers' strike. If the stuff Frank spends so much time analyzing has no real hold on ordinary Americans, why bother taking it so seriously? If it does, a point he understandably shies away from, well, we've got bigger problems.

This brings us to another weakness in Frank's analysis. Anyone who reads *The Baffler* knows the magazine's symbol is a bulldozer, and, at times, Frank's writing bulldozes. For instance, he caricatures the "civic journalism" movement. Civic journalists complain about the superficiality of the mass media and argue for connecting journalism with democratic and civic improvement. Now, I'm no defender of the movement, and Frank is right to warn against its tendency to turn journalism into cheerleading and telling good stories to please. Nevertheless, the civic journalists I have read do not glamorize "focus groups" and "polling," as Frank suggests. They are fans of Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere in which deliberating citizens hold political representatives accountable to democratic demands. Civic journalists help out this deliberative process rather than sell out to niceness, as Frank suggests.

In the end, Frank perhaps makes a bit too much of Tom Peters and ignores those who mounted a serious and challenging critique of statist policies during the 1980s and 1990s. The Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) and sociologist Anthony Giddens (the leading intellectual for New Labor in England) make more difficult targets for Frank's arguments. Throughout the 1990s, the DLC took Reagan Democrats seriously as well as the idea that government cannot solve all problems. By focusing solely on the silly prognostications of *Fast Company*, Frank ignores thinkers who are much less easy to scoff at.

With this said, Frank has renewed a much-needed tradition in the history of American letters. He has written accessible and witty social criticism in a day and age of right-wing dominance and left-wing marginality. Though the witiness can sometimes become evasive, Frank deserves our praise for raising crucial issues in a way that entertains and challenges us at the same time. □

Kevin Mattson *is associate director of the Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy (Rutgers University) and author of* Creating a Democratic Public *(University of Pennsylvania Press). He is writing a book on the history of New Left intellectuals.*

HOW EQUAL CAN WE BE?

Sovereign Virtue
The Theory and Practice of Equality
Ronald Dworkin
Harvard University Press, $35, 512 pp.

David McCabe

Second only to John Rawls in his influence on contemporary liberal theory, Ronald Dworkin has matched his prolific first-class work in legal and political philosophy with a steady stream of essays in the *New York Review of Books.* Those essays (four of which serve as chapters in this book) have made him familiar to scores of intelligent readers beyond the academy. His uncommon ability to move between the worlds of rigorous philosophical analysis and a broader readership is mirrored in the division of *Sovereign Virtue* into two parts.

In part 1 ("Theory"), Dworkin explores what the norm of human equality demands of a political community. Rejecting the profitless notion that it mandates treating all persons equally (I don't violate equality in any worrisome way when I give students different grades on their papers), Dworkin stresses that equality requires treating all with equal concern. But what does this involve, exactly?

In the lengthy essay, first published in 1981, that makes up the first two chapters, Dworkin argues that equal concern cannot require ensuring equal welfare for

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all. Aside from its enormous pragmatic difficulties, the goal of equal welfare is, Dworkin insists, conceptually incoherent: since people differ in their conceptions of welfare (is it pleasure? preference-satisfaction? objectively valuable goods?), to rely on any such conception privileges some people over others and thus violates equality. Instead, Dworkin claims that equal concern requires that all citizens be provided equal resources with which to pursue their life plans. This does not mean that someone's level of resources may never surpass anyone else's. Distributional schemes demanding that sort of equality inevitably fail to respond to individual choice, ambition, and responsibility: if I work hard and sacrifice much, while you mostly sunbathe, it is no affront to fairness if I come to have greater resources than you. So long as our inequality results from choices we have made (which may include different choices when faced with risk), and so long as we began from equal starting points, you cannot complain of injustice.

The rub, of course, is that few begin from equal starting points, and here significant questions arise for Dworkin's account. Dworkin wants distributive justice to be sensitive to those particularities for which we are responsible (my diligence, your fecklessness), but not to reflect those which result from brute luck (my inborn talents, your poor parents). But it is often quite hard to distinguish the two. To be sure, some cases are straightforward: those born with severe physical handicaps face undeserved hardship, and Dworkin's solution, while perhaps difficult to enact (it involves a complicated hypothetical insurance scheme in which we imagine the premium that those ignorant of their own condition would pay to be compensated if they turn out to be handicapped), is not in principle objectionable. But how much are my diligence, my willingness to delay short-term gratification, the result of my own effort (thus legitimating my greater share of the pie), and how much do they result from my nurturing family environment or personality traits I inherited, neither of which I deserve and which cannot sanction unequal resources?

A related charge can be leveled at Dworkin's willingness to regard natural talents as shared resources whose distribution is subject to the interests of the collective. In criticizing John Rawls, Michael Sandel has famously argued that such a liberal orientation—what Sandel calls the idea of the unencumbered self—undermines our deepest sense of who we are and what we may ultimately call our own, and the same problem threatens Dworkin's account.

Concerns like these have been directed against Dworkin since his argument first appeared almost twenty years ago, and readers will be disappointed that he has chosen to reprint his original argument unaltered, rather than revise it to engage the rich debate it has engendered. What that debate has revealed, some would claim, is that our commitment to equalizing life chances, though critical to political morality for reasons Dworkin articulates, does not tell the whole story. Some acquiescence to fate, some recognition of personal autonomy, some respect for the privacy of the family, are just three factors that may work against the ideal of equality as Dworkin understands it. My guess is that acknowledging such factors need not seriously weaken Dworkin's argument for a broadly egalitarian scheme that corrects for certain unjust and arbitrary circumstances (conditions of severe poverty, for example) while still allowing differences in wealth that reflect our inescapable sense of personal merit. I would have liked to see Dworkin make that case more directly.

In the rest of part 1, Dworkin tracks the implications of equality through various theoretical inquiries: the relation between equality and liberty, the notion of political equality, and—to my mind most interesting—the question of whether one's ability to lead a good life is compromised by living in a society with serious injustice. He reasons that since one can lead a truly good life only in the right circumstances, and since such circumstances are met only in a society committed to equality of resources, the connection between leading a good life and inhabiting a just society follows naturally. *Too* naturally, readers may think: Dworkin appears simply to have smuggled into his conception of a good life precisely what is in question. But he also hints at a deeper argument, one involving the importance in a good life of relations of mutual respect, civic friendship, and the shared sense of maintaining a healthy polity. This way of making the point seems to me much more persuasive.

Part 2 ("Practice") takes up topical controversies: health care, welfare reform, the effectiveness and fairness (helpfully distinguished) of affirmative action, campaign finance reform, euthanasia, and bioethics. Readers of this magazine, likely to be especially interested in these last two, may be disappointed with the treatment of euthanasia. Dworkin's focus is predominantly on judicial decisions in this area, rather than on broader moral issues.

The discussion of bioethics, in contrast, is bracing. After dispatching some of the less interesting objections often trotted out against bioethical research (its inherent unpredictability, the threat to human diversity), Dworkin suggests that the true source of our unease involves the way bioethics threatens to disturb so radically the orienting framework of our moral sensibilities. His point here is that much of our thinking about values is predicated on what he calls the chance/choice distinction—the former referring to that which is not up to us and which we are powerless to change, the latter to what we can control and thus take responsibility for. But bioethical research, because it offers us the choice of intentionally shaping what has historically been out of our hands (for example, the very constitution of our physical being), threatens to relocate the chance/choice distinction at some utterly unfamiliar place. The result is that we are hopelessly unprepared for the host of disturbing questions that will arise: Will abortion be legal for fetuses who are destined to be not very bright? May insurance companies insist that applicants be genetically tested? Who will control this information? Nor, Dworkin suggests, is there any retreat from such perplexing questions. Once the chance/ choice distinction is up

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for grabs, once we acknowledge our power to change the previously fixed points that orient our moral judgments, our moorings are already cut.

My own sense is that we may, collectively, have more control than Dworkin allows over how far afield we shall drift. If we take it as axiomatic that increasing knowledge is always to our betterment, then bioethical research will proceed unabated and we shall lose our moral ballast. But surely this scenario itself should give us immediate pause. The unlikelihood of any collective decision to halt the pace of bioethical research does not alter the fact that increased caution might forestall to some degree the moral free fall Dworkin envisions, nor should it blind us to the fact that when we find ourselves falling, it will have resulted from choices we have made that could have been different.

What I've suggested here may not really be an argument. Perhaps it's just a plea for maintaining a deep skepticism, one that reflects my own fumbling sense of the humility appropriate to creatures like us. Dworkin himself, it must be said, appears genuinely mindful of such humane concerns, and his palpable concern with the experience of nonphilosophers (alas, not shared by all in his profession) should help sustain readers as they negotiate the more intellectually formidable aspects of this book. Philosophers are fond (probably overfond) of making fine distinctions. Even the most attentive readers may at times find themselves exhausted by the intricacies of Dworkin's arguments. For them, the essays in part 2 will come as welcome relief and reward. There they will find an exceptionally able mind giving forceful articulation to many of their deepest hopes and fears for our collective well-being. Dworkin feels deeply the offenses against equality and decency that motivate his work. How can you not love someone who begins one essay with the declaration, "Our politics are a disgrace, and money is the root of the problem"? He's a man after my own heart. □

David McCabe *teaches philosophy at Colgate University.*

ON DYING: HIS & OURS

Death on a Friday Afternoon
Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross
Richard John Neuhaus
Basic Books, $24, 272 pp.

The Eternal Pity
Reflections on Dying
Richard John Neuhaus, editor
University of Notre Dame Press, $25, 180 pp.

Brian E. Daley

In my pre-Vatican II youth, one of the high points of Holy Week each year was the Three Hours service on Good Friday afternoon. Our family usually attended this in a neighboring parish, where Scripture readings, hymns, and silent meditation were skillfully interwoven into a long liturgical collage, and where the organist (a stern-looking old gentleman with the intimidating name of Mr. Boyd-Smack) played Dubois's thunderous "earthquake music" at the point when we recalled Jesus' death. The heart of the service, however, was preaching: a guest homilist would offer extended reflections on the "seven last words" of Jesus—the sayings of Jesus while he hung on the cross, culled from the four Gospels and compressed into the framework for a continuous narrative of the Passion. Such Good Friday services, of course, were standard Catholic fare from the late seventeenth century until the middle of the twentieth century, and expressed the deep conviction, shared by Protestants and Catholics alike, that the Passion and death of Jesus are the climax of his revelation of God's love and reconciling mercy, in the midst of human weakness and sin.

In *Death on a Friday Afternoon*, Richard John Neuhaus, editor of *First Things* and outspoken commentator on the religious debates and "social wars" of contemporary America, offers us a new essay in this venerable genre: extended meditations on the seven gospel sayings of Jesus on the cross, which grew out of the author's attempt to preach such a service in a New York parish several years ago. It is a serious, wide-ranging book that struggles to deal, in nontechnical language, with some of the central themes in the perennial Christian preaching of salvation through Jesus: the connection of death with sin, the value of Jesus' death as proof of love and atoning sacrifice, the quality of the hope in the face of death offered believers—a hope that in its authentic form never trivializes or suppresses the violence and finality of

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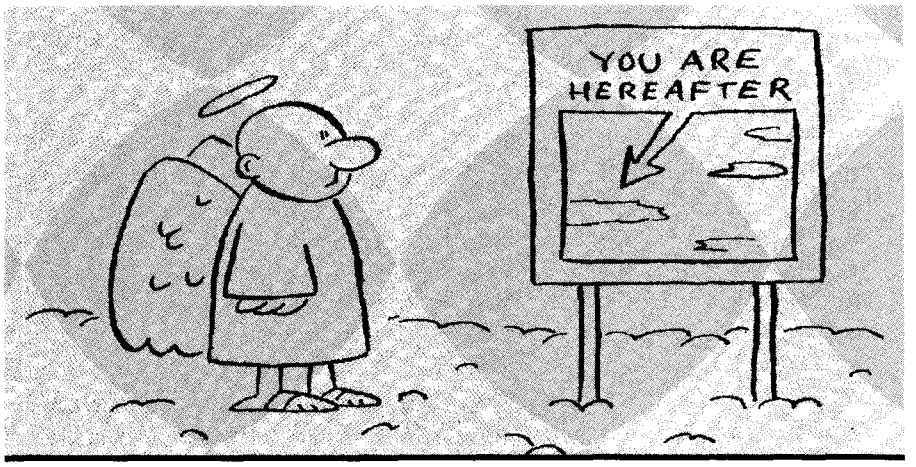

death, but that assures us the God of indestructible life is our companion even in death's darkness.

Almost simultaneously, Neuhaus has published a second volume, *The Eternal Pity: Reflections on Dying*, as part of the University of Notre Dame Press's promising new series of anthologies on practical morality, The Ethics of Everyday Life. This book is a beautifully chosen (and handsomely produced) collection of literary pieces reflecting on the ways death strikes the human heart: poems by Donne, Herbert, and Dylan Thomas, stories by Tolstoy and Flannery O'Connor, philosophical and journalistic essays, even some selections from the Qur'an. Neuhaus prefaces his anthology with a condensed but thoughtful overview of how death has been viewed by the great religious traditions of the world, by Western philosophy, and by various strands in our own culture; he ends his essay with a moving narration of his own near brush with death from undetected intestinal cancer, in the winter of 1993, and of the transforming effect that experience has had on his faith and hope as a Christian. That event, in fact, as Neuhaus recounts it, seems to stand as the personal backdrop for both books: a dramatic confrontation with darkness that led him to wrestle anew with the meaning of both Christ's death and our own.

Those familiar with Neuhaus's arch and uncharitable musings in the editorial pages of *First Things* may be surprised to discover a different voice in these two books. Flashes of social criticism occasionally appear, as in Neuhaus's trenchant reflections on the gnostic tendency of much contemporary American religion or our psychoanalytically rooted "idolatry of the conflicted self," and there is just a hint of condescension in some of his allusions to the late Raymond Brown's work (although Neuhaus admits his indebtedness to Brown's *The Death of the Messiah*). For the most part, however, the tone is pastoral and constructive, as both books invite the reader to approach the threat and the mystery of death in a contemplative spirit. "A measure of reticence and silence is in order," Neuhaus observes in his introduction to *The Eternal Pity*. "There is a time simply to be present to death—whether one's own or that of others—without any felt urgencies about doing something about it or getting over it." And such reverent, unhurrying silence is all the more necessary, he often reminds us, when one is approaching the saving mystery of the death of Christ.

The real strength of both books, I think, is that they invite us to take death seriously, rather than to reach for religious or cultural palliatives, and to hear in the gospel of the crucified Christ a message of consolation that does not avoid the tragedy of death, but that paradoxically finds life in it. Observing the widespread tendency of modern culture to suggest that death is "no big deal," Neuhaus insists: "For those dying their own death and the death of those they love, death is a very big deal indeed. Don't tell them that it doesn't matter, that they'll get over it, that things will look brighter tomorrow. Death is, in the words of Saint Paul, 'the last enemy' (1 Cor. 15:26). The only consolation to be trusted is the consolation that is on the far side of the inconsolable."

It is only against the background of the serious, sometimes wrenching views of death that Neuhaus has assembled in *The Eternal Pity*, in fact, that one can fully appreciate his reflections on the meaning of the cross in *Death on a Friday Afternoon*: the anthology not only documents many of the literary allusions in his meditations, but undergirds his sense of the church's need to return to profound and patient reflection on the meaning of Jesus' death for us. Neuhaus's approach to Jesus' death is solidly traditional, reflecting the background of his thinking in both the Lutheran *theologia crucis* and in classic Catholic soteriology. Although framed around the "seven last words" of Jesus, Neuhaus admits, "the book is not entirely meditative...arguments are also advanced, and there is some vigorous wrestling with traditional doctrine...about the death of Christ." So Neuhaus reminds us of the Pauline teaching that the death we humans experience is always rooted in our "long, terrible history" of sin, and that sin requires expiation, atonement, purgation: "something must be done." The free action of God the Son to take sinful humanity on himself, to make it fully his humanity, and to let sin work out all its bloody force in his own humiliation and death, continues to puzzle and scandalize us, to challenge all our powers of theological reasoning: "The order of things is shattered." Yet this mystifying affirmation of a God who became human to die with us, for us, in our place, and to rise triumphant from death without simply turning death's sin-colored reality into a myth, is surely central to the Christian proclamation of God's reality, to our understanding of who and what God is: "The perfect self-surrender of the cross is, from eternity and to eternity, at the heart of what it means to say that God is love." And the consolation which the cross offers us, as we face death ourselves, is precisely that "we are not alone," but have been "brought into the good company of God"—"we are implicated in the mystery of sin and redemption. We are participants in this drama, although exactly how we do not know."

Doctrine and argument, then, are cen-

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tral to *Death on a Friday Afternoon*—doctrine at the heart of the Christian message, yet traditionally so challenging to our powers of argument and analysis as to resist any clear theological consensus on how it might best be understood. It is in its attempts at theological argument, in fact, that the book reveals its greatest weakness. Neuhaus has attempted here to combine different rhetorical styles and different goals: homiletic meditation on scriptural texts, critical observations on contemporary culture, and a spectrum of theological approaches, classical and contemporary, to the saving value for us of Christ's death. The result is a rather rambling set of reflections that has occasional passages of real insight and power, but also its share of platitudes, and that offers us disappointingly little by way of a unified message or a clear interpretive focus, either theological or spiritual. In the end, *The Eternal Pity* seems to me the better book, both in the portrait of human responses to death that the anthology assembles, and in Neuhaus's carefully crafted introduction. In both its terseness and its variety, it offers greater unity of vision and richer nourishment to the soul. □

Brian E. Daley, S.J., *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

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Index to Volume CXXVII

January 14, 2000 to December 15, 2000

Articles and Poetry

Aleman, Tiina ..... Critics' choices for Christmas 21:27 D 1
Aleshire, Daniel
Seminaries, theologates, and the future of church ministry: a symposium 3:23 Fe 11
Alleva, Richard ..... End of the affair 7:19 Ap 7
Andreassi, Anthony D. ..... Fighting Ed McGlynn 16:31 S 22
Ayres, Bill ..You Say Distance Means Nothing: a poem 5:36 Mr 10
Bane, Mary Jo ..... You Catholic? Here's how to vote 18:19 O 20
Bauman, Richard ..... Solon, spare those trees 6:31 Mr 24
Baumann, Paul ..... Our man in Westport 3:6 Fe 11
Counting votes 19:7 N 3
Pius XII & the Holocaust 21:8 D 1
Beckmann, David ..... Debt relief at the millennium 22:12 D 15
Berne, Suzanne ..... Summer reading 12:20 Je 16
Breiner, Laurence ..... Summer reading 12:19 Je 16
Brown, Robert McAfee ..... From the archives 14:15 Au 11
Burnham, Deborah S. ..... Laundry: a poem 4:20 Fe 25
Burris, Keith ..... As clear as glass 16:19 S 22
Byrne, Katharine ..... Comfort me with ivy 12:31 Je 16
Cadnum, Michael ..... Whales: a poem 1:16 Ja 14
Cahill, Elizabeth Kirkland
Dancing, adorably, in the womb 10:31 My 19
Callahan, Daniel ..... It's the culture, stupid 3:8 Fe 11
Food for thought 7:7 Ap 7
Splitting hairs 11:7 Je 2
On turning 70 15:10 S 8
Callahan, Sidney ..... We're all original sinners 2:7 Ja 280
Better to light a candle 6:7 Mr 24
Prayer makes a difference 8:7 Ap 21
Turn off that cell phone! 12:7 Je 16
Gender differences 16:9 S 22
Human rights & religion 20:8 N 17
Christie, John ..... 'There will be a second collection' 20:31 N 17
Cochran, Clarke E. ..... Another identity crisis 4:12 Fe 25
'A Fair & Just Workplace' 4:14 Fe 25
Cogley, John ..... From the archives 14:15 Au 11
Condini, Ned ..... Matins: a poem 5:22 Mr 10
Congar, Yves ..... Easter hope 8:6 Ap 21
Connor, James L. ..... How to heal managed care 4:17 Fe 25
Conroy, Christopher A.
Baptist is nice. Catholic is home. 21:31 D 1

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cooper, Rand Richards ....Men of a certain age 9:9 My 5
Cording, Robert ....I: a poem 13:16 Jl 14
Creech, Morrie ....Triptych: a poem 3:18 Fe 11
Dardess, George ....The 'bolillo' 15:47 S 8
Davis, Robert Murray ....Old enmities endure 14:9 Au 11
de Souza, Raymond ....Confronting the church's past 1:14 Ja 14
Dionne, E.J., Jr. ....Vouchers 5:8 Mr 10
Is the tax revolt over? 9:8 My 5
Keeping promises 10:8 My 19
Follow the (tax) money 13:7 Jl 14
Unions & Gore 19:8 N 3
Crossing the line 21:7 D 1
Donaghy, Daniel....Digging for Summer: 1986: a poem 11:12 Je 2
Donnelly, Daria ....Hey! Harry Potter has cousins! 7:23 Ap 7
Summer reading 12:26 Je 16
Big questions for small readers 20:23 N 17
Doyle, Brian ....The tale of JC1654 8:39 Ap 21
Sweeping up 17:31 O 6
Egan, Robert J. ....Two versions of history 15:7 S 8
Elie, Paul ....Never say die 11:31 Je 2
Elliott, Andrea....The new Chile 7:9 Ap 7
Ellner, Steve....Chavez's revolution 3:11 Fe 11
Ellsberg, Peggy ....Critics' choices for Christmas 21:21 D 1
Fandel, John ....Apostrophe: a poem 10:20 My 19
Ferkiss, Victor ....www.heresy.com 10:9 My 19
Feuerherd, Peter ....A 'Wing' & a prayer 5:47 Mr 10
Motown Moses 22:31 D 15
Fisher, James T. ....Charlie's world 15:13 S 8
Gaillardetz, Richard R. ....Learning from marriage 15:18 S 8
Garvey, John ....Give me your tired, your poor 1:7 Ja 14
The Bible & the Big Bang 5:7 Mr 10
The hidden God 7:8 Ap 7
Opting out of belief 10:7 My 19
Wills's book is very good 14:8 Au 11
Dear Voter: God loves me 17:7 O 6
Ecumenically challenged 22:7 D 15
Garvey, Michael O. ....My boss is a Jewish carpenter 4:31 Fe 25
Gilsdorf, Ethan ....Butterflies: a poem 15: 25 S 8
Godfrey, A.W. ....In the public interest 3:47 Fe 11
Gordon, Mary....Desperately seeking Joan 5:11 Mr 10
Grayson, George W. ....Report from Mexico 12:8 Je 16
Griffin, Richard....Critics' choices for Christmas 21:28 D 1
Haldane, John ....Catholic Scotland? 13:8 Jl 14
Hamilton, Carol....Such Deaths: a poem 13:9 Jl 14
Hampl, Patricia ....The sacrament of reconciliation 7:11 Ap 7
Haught, John F. ....Evolution & God's humility 2:12 Ja 28
Higgins, George G. ....Are unions obsolete? 19:10 N 3
Hill, John ....Reynold Hillenbrand 5:15 Mr 10
Hillenbrand, Barry....My Uncle Reynie 5:19 Mr 10
Horgan, John ....Catholic Ireland 5:9 Mr 10
Hoyt, Robert G. ....Israel & Palestine 1:11 Ja 14
As I lay joking 13:31 Jl 14
Hunt, John F. ....Look before you sign 19:11 N 3
Imbelli, Robert P.
Seminaries, theologates, and the future of church ministry: a symposium 3:22 Fe 11
Rome & relativism 18:13 O 20
Jabusch, Willard Francis....Relative morality 19:47 N 3
Jennings, Russ....Ferment: a poem 14:14 Au 11
Jewell, Michael ....The Way of Heaven: a poem 6:16 Mr 24
Jordan, Patrick ....Eye on Sudan 6:6 Mr 24
Go in peace 20:6 N 17
Keen, Suzanne....Peter Ackroyd & Catholic England 19:14 N 3
Kennedy, Philip....Rome & relativism 18:14 O 20
King, Heather ....Quitting the bar, twice 10:11 My 19
Komonchak, Joseph A. ....Remembering Good Pope John 14:11 Au 11
Krivak, Andrew ....Reading Homer: a poem 8:32 Ap 21
Krupnick, Mark....Religion & the modern novel 9:11 My 5
Langan, John....Reforging Catholic identity 8:20 Ap 21
Lax, Robert ....Harlem Rooftop: a poem 19:18 N 3
Leckey, Dolores
Seminaries, theologates, and the future of church ministry: a symposium 3:22 Fe 11
Leege, David....Divining the electorate 18:16 O 20
Lieberman, Harvey J. ....Free & easy 14:31 Au 11
Lozada, Carlos ....Debt relief 4:9 Fe 25
Peru's dilemma 20:10 N 17
Lynch, John A. ....Landscape & memory 13:10 Jl 14
Lysaught, M. Therese ....Is it killing? 18:9 O 20
McCarraher, Eugene ....You Catholic? Here's how to vote 18:22 O 20
McDermott, Alice ..Confessions of a reluctant Catholic 3:12 Fe 11
McGough, Michael ....God & man at prep school 10:18 My 19
McGowan, Jo....Uncomfortable in comfort 4:7 Fe 25
Not your standard Auntie 9:7 My 5
'Thinking' Catholics 13:6 Jl 14
Too much, too soon, too often 18:8 O 20
Christmas in India 22:8 D 15
McGreevy, John T. ..A case for doctrinal development 20:12 N 17
McWilliams, Wilson Carey....Primary lessons 6:9 Mr 24
Campaign 2000 16:10 S 22
Split down the middle 21:10 D 1
Mandle, Jay R. ....Trading up 11:15 Je 2
Marciniak, Ed....Recalculating poverty 2:10 Ja 28
Marget, Madeline ....Summer reading 12:23 Je 16
Marty, Martin E. ....Rome & relativism 18:12 O 20
Midbon, Mark ....'A day without yesterday' 6:18 Mr 24
Moran, Daniel Thomas....Translating Now: a poem 21:8 D 1
Mueller, Philip ....Critics' choices for Christmas 21:26 D 1
Murphy, Peter E. ....Chemical Imbalance: a poem 7:22 Ap 7
Nichols, Terence L. ....Who's afraid of hierarchy? 7:16 Ap 7
Nicol, Alfred....Guinea Pig: a poem 16:14 S 22
Ritual Pantoum for Changing the Aquarium: a poem 12:14 Je 16
Novak, Michael....From the archives 14:16 Au 11
O'Brien, Dennis ....Gay marriage 1:9 Ja 14
Vermont's Leahy 12:10 Je 16
O'Connell, Nicholas ....At one with the natural world 6:11 Mr 24
O'Gara, Margaret ....Lutherans & Catholics 1:8 Ja 14
O'Gorman, Ned ....States of Mind: a poem 11:18 Je 2
Oakes, Edward T. ....A second opinion 11:13 Je 2
Pfaff, William ....Lonely new world 2:8 Ja 28
The future 3:9 Fe 11
Right turn in Austria 4:8 Fe 25
Peace in Kosovo? 6:8 Mr 24
Africa founders 8:8 Ap 21
Pinochet's downfall 16:8 S 22
Israel & the Palestinians 18:7 O 20
Strange allies 20:9 N 17
Pope, Stephen J. ....A response to Christopher Ruddy 11:11 Je 2
Porter, Anne ....Burning: a poem 15:16 S 8
Portier, William L. ..In defense of Mount Saint Mary's 3:31 Fe 11
Poulin, Joan....Bethlehem Christmas 22:9 D 15
Pratt, Charles W. ....His Solitude: a poem 19:24 N 3
Reagan, Kathleen ....Prison ministry 15:11 S 8
Reidy, Maurice Timothy
Joe Lieberman's orthodoxy & ours 18:31 O 20
Rodden, John ....The Berlin Wall lives 16:11 S 22
Ruddy, Christopher ....Young theologians 8:17 Ap 21
The author replies 11:14 Je 2
Saunders, Paul C. ....A cautionary tale 8:12 Ap 21
Schickel, Joseph ....Building churches 15:22 S 8
Schmuhl, Robert ....Critics' choices for Christmas 21:22 D 1
Schroth, Raymond A. ....Sister Helen Prejean 17:11 O 6
Hollywood's version 17:12 O 6
Do you wish to argue? 17:15 O 6
Schultz, Valerie....Lord, when did I smell you? 1:30 Ja 14
Senser, Robert ....Workers of the world 16:13 S 22
Shuter, Bill ....The Tridentine Mass 15:24 S 8
Simon, William E., Jr. ....Lay preaching 15:26 S 8
Stanton, Vincent P. ....Be still 2:31 Ja 28
Steinfels, Peter ....Movable planks 15:8 S 8
Stoltz, Eric ....Signs of the times 7:31 Ap 7
Surlis, Paul....Making doctrine 16:7 S 22
Terris, Daniel....Summer reading 12:25 Je 16
Trout, Paul ....Teacher evaluations 8:10 Ap 21
Vitullo-Martin, Julia ....We, the jury 11:9 Je 2
Weakland, Rembert G. ..Critics' choices for Christmas 21:24 D 1
Weigel, George ....You Catholic? Here's how to vote 18:20 O 20
Wheeler, Edward T. ....Dance marathon 9:31 My 5
White, Robert E. ....Shooting up Colombia 17:8 O 6
Justice deferred 21:12 D 1

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Wilson, Steve .....Listening for Language: a poem 9:14 My 5
Zeller, Shawn .....Dignity's challenge 13:17 Jl 14

Book Reviews

Achieving Our Country:
By Richard Rorty .....Eugene McCarraher 10:24 My 19
Africana:
Edited by Kwame Anthony Appiah and
Henry Louis Gates Jr. .....Julia Vitullo-Martin 4:26 Fe 25
All Creation Is Groaning:
Edited by Carol J. Dempsey and Russell A. Butkus
.....Robert Jaquay 5:39 Mr 10
American Paradox, The:
By David G. Myers.....Neil Coughlan 17:24 O 6
At the Corner of East and Now:
By Frederica Mathewes-Green
.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 8:34 Ap 21
Augustine through the Ages:
Edited by Allan D. Fitzgerald
.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 11:27 Je 2
Banyan Tree, The:
By Christopher Nolan .....Abigail McCarthy 14:24 Au 11
Being Dead:
By Jim Crace .....F. González-Crussi 13:27 Jl 14
A Bishop's Tale:
By Craig E. Harline and Eddy Put.....Eamon Duffy 22:19 D 15
Book of Miracles, The:
By Kenneth L. Woodward ..Luke Timothy Johnson 9:26 My 5
Buddha from Brooklyn, The:
By Martha Sherrill .....Robert A. Orsi 17:21 O 6
Cardinal Ratzinger:
By John L. Allen Jr. .....Joseph A. Komonchak 19:31 N 3
Catholic Imagination, The:
By Andrew M. Greeley.....James T. Fisher 9:20 My 5
Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century, The:
By Robert Royal .....Lawrence S. Cunningham 16:26 S 22
A Catholic Modernity?:
By Charles Taylor .....Robert Burns 20:27 N 17
Century of the Gene, The:
By Evelyn Fox Keller .....Austin L. Hughes 19:34 N 3
Changing Face of the Priesthood, The:
By Donald B. Cozzens .....Robert J. Egan 14:20 Au 11
Cherry:
By Mary Karr.....Valerie Sayers 19:27 N 3
Christian Critics:
By Eugene McCarraher .....Christopher Shannon 17:22 O 6
Christian Hermit in an Islamic World:
By Ali Merad.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 19:39 N 3
Christian Spirituality: An Introduction:
By Alister McGrath .....Lawrence S. Cunningham 6:25 Mr 24
Christian Spirituality: An Introduction to the
Heritage:
By Charles J. Healey.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 6:26 Mr 24
Christians in Asia before 1500:
By Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit
.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 11:28 Je 2
City of God:
By E.L. Doctorow .....Paul Elie 9:22 My 5
Complete Stories of Evelyn Waugh, The:
By Evelyn Waugh.....Robert Murray Davis 1:25 Ja 14
Dead Center:
By James MacGregor Burns and
Georgia J. Sorensen .....Wilson Carey McWilliams 8:26 Ap 21
Death of Character, The:
By James Davison Hunter.....Alan Wolfe 11:22 Je 2
Death on a Friday Afternoon:
By Richard John Neuhaus .....Brian E. Daley 22:23 D 15
Deliver Us from Evil:
By William Shawcross .....R. Scott Appleby 14:24 Au 11
Democracy Derailed:
By David Broder.....Kevin Mattson 9:24 My 5
Density of the Present, The:
By Gustavo Gutierrez ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 6:26 Mr 24
Development as Freedom:
By Amartya Sen.....Jay R. Mandle 1:24 Ja 14
Dictionary of Third World Theologies:
Edited by Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah
.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 19:40 N 3
Diversity and Distrust:
By Stephen Macedo .....Richard Boyd 16:25 S 22
Doctors of the Church, The:
By Bernard McGinn .....Lawrence S. Cunningham 6:24 Mr 24
Elegy for Kosovo:
By Ismail Kadare.....Brian D. Phillips 15:36 S 8
Encarta Africana 2000:
Edited by Kwame Anthony Appiah and
Henry Louis Gates Jr. .....Julia Vitullo-Martin 4:26 Fe 25
The Eternal Pity:
Edited by Richard John Neuhaus.....Brian E. Daley 22:23 D 15
Eve:
By Pamela Norris.....Edward T. Wheeler 5:38 Mr 10
Fairfield Porter:
By Justin Spring.....Donna Gustafson 7:26 Ap 7
Faith among Faiths:
By James Fredericks.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 15:41 S 8
Father and the Son, The:
By Matt Murray .....Lawrence S. Cunningham 8:34 Ap 21
Future of American Progressivism, The:
By Roberto Mangebeira Unger and Cornell West
.....Eugene McCarraher 10:25 My 19
Genes, Genesis, and God:
By Holmes Rolston III .....M. Therese Lysaught 2:24 Ja 28
Gentleman from New York, The:
By Godfrey Hodgson .....Charles R. Morris 16:21 S 22
God's Name in Vain:
By Stephen L. Carter .....Alan Wolfe 19:29 N 3
Great Shame, The:
By Thomas Keneally .....James Duffy 8:30 Ap 21
How Do We Know When It's God?
By Dan Wakefield .....Lawrence S. Cunningham 15:40 S 8
Human Phenomenon, The:
By Pierre Teilhard de Chardin .....John F. Haught 16:23 S 22
In Love with Night:
By Ronald Steel .....Charles R. Morris 3:34 Fe 11
Inside Terrorism:
By Bruce Hoffman .....James Finn 7:27 Ap 7
Journal of a Soul:
By Pope John XXIII .....Christopher Ruddy 5:28 Mr 10
Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann:
1973–83:
Translated by Juliana Schmemann
.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 16:28 S 22
Knox Brothers, The:
By Penelope Fitzgerald .....Edward T. Wheeler 19:32 N 3
Kosovo: A Short History:
By Noel Malcolm.....Brian D. Phillips 15:36 S 8
Kosovo: War and Revenge:
By Tim Judah .....Brian D. Phillips 15:36 S 8
Late Antiquity:
Edited by G.W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and
Oleg Grabar.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 11:27 Je 2
Lord Acton:
By Roland Hill.....James Finn 15:30 S 8
Lourdes:
By Ruth Harris .....Steven Englund 8:28 Ap 21
Mandela:
By Anthony Sampson .....Don Wycliff 4:23 Fe 25
Morality and Contemporary Warfare:
By James Turner Johnson.....J. Bryan Hehir 5:32 Mr 10
My Father's Gun:
Brian McDonald .....Maurice Timothy Reidy 2:28 Ja 28
My Staggerford Journal:
By Jon Hassler .....Ed Block 11:24 Je 2
Mysterious Flame, The:
By Colin McGinn .....Bernard G. Prusak 10:28 My 19
No Religion Is an Island:
Edited by Edward Bristow
.....Lawrence S. Cunningham 1:27 Ja 14

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On Pilgrimage:
By Dorothy Day ....Patrick Jordan 5:36 Mr 10
One Market under God:
By Thomas Frank ....Kevin Mattson 22:20 D 15
One Nation, Two Cultures:
By Gertrude Himmelfarb
....Barbara Dafoe Whitehead 5:34 Mr 10
Oscar Romero:
By María López Vigil ....Patrick Jordan 18:28 O 20
Other American, The:
By Maurice Isserman ....James T. Fisher 13:26 Jl 14
Painting the Word:
By John Drury ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 8:32 Ap 21
Papal Sin:
By Garry Wills ....Eamon Duffy 13:24 Jl 12
Paradox of American Democracy, The:
By John Judis ....Kevin Mattson 9:24 My 5
Peace Be with You:
By Eileen Egan ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 8:32 Ap 21
Peace Now!:
By Rhodi Jeffreys-Jones ....Chris Appy 4:24 Fe 25
Philosophy and Social Hope:
By Richard Rorty ....Eugene McCarraher 10:25 My 19
Plowing the Dark:
By Richard Powers ....Valerie Sayers 15:35 S 8
Poverty and Joy:
By William Short ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 15:40 S 8
Power of Kings, The:
By Paul Kléber Monod ....Carl L. Bankson III 11:25 Je 2
Prayer and the New Testament:
By Robert Karris ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 19:38 N 3
Problems Unique to the Holocaust:
Edited by Harry James Cargass
....Edward McGlynn Gaffney Jr. 5:21 Mr 10
Reading the Gospel:
By John Dunne ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 16:28 S 22
Real American Dream, The:
By Andrew Delbanco ....Eugene McCarraher 10:25 My 19
Reclaiming Spirituality:
By Diarmuid O'Murchu
....Lawrence S. Cunningham 6:27 Mr 24
Redeeming the Time:
By Stephen Bede Scharper ....Robert Jaquay 5:39 Mr 10
Red Smith on Baseball:
With a Foreword by Ira Berkow
....Maurice Timothy Reidy 14:28 Au 11
Reform of the Papacy, The:
By John R. Quinn ....Martin E. Marty 2:22 Ja 28
Rome Reshaped:
By Desmond O'Grady ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 1:28 Ja 14
Rome 1300:
By Herbert L. Kessler and Johanna Zacharias
....Lawrence S. Cunningham 16:27 S 22
Sacred Roads:
By Nicholas Shrady ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 1:28 Ja 14
Shakespeare's Language:
By Frank Kermode ....Edward T. Oakes 15:38 S 8
Silence of Sodom, The:
By Mark D. Jordan ....Dennis O'Brien 15:33 S 8
Song and the Truth, The:
By Helga Ruebsamen ....Madeline Marget 19:36 N 3
Sovereign Virtue:
By Ronald Dworkin ....David McCabe 22:21 D 15
Spirited Lives:
By Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith
....Lawrence S. Cunningham 1:27 Ja 14
A Stairway to Paradise:
By Madeleine St. John ....Elizabeth Kirkland Cahill 3:36 Fe 11
Stories Jesus Told:
By John Jay Hughes ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 19:39 N 3
Teaching Sex:
By Jeffrey P. Moran ....Barbara Dafoe Whitehead 11:21 Je 2
Tears of Blood:
By Mary Craig ....Emmy Chang 5:30 Mr 10
Teresa of Avila:
By Cathleen Medwick ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 2:26 Ja 28
Thinking Ecologically:
Edited by Marian R. Chertow and Daniel C. Esty
....Robert Jaquay 5:39 Mr 10
2000 Years of Classic Christian Prayers:
Edited by Owen Collins
....Lawrence S. Cunningham 15:43 S 8
Ultimate Terrorists, The:
By Jessica Stern ....James Finn 7:27 Ap 7
Under the Rose:
By Flavia Alaya ....Margaret O'Brien Steinfels 1:22 Ja 14
Undiscovered Mind, The:
By John Horgan ....John F. Haught 6:22 Mr 24
Virtual War:
By Michael Ignatieff ....Brian D. Phillips 15:36 S 8
When We Were Orphans:
By Kazuo Ishiguro ....Alice McDermott 19:25 N 3
White Teeth:
By Zadie Smith ....Anita Mathias 14:27 Au 11
Wild Decembers:
By Edna O'Brien ....Molly Winans 9:19 My 5
Women Saints:
By Kathleen Jones ....Lawrence S. Cunningham 15:44 S 8
Working-Class New York:
By Joshua B. Freeman ....Bruce Nelson 18:26 O 20

Index of Principal Subjects in Articles, Editorials, and Letters

Abortion, 6:5 Mr 24; 8:4 Ap 21; 9:4 My 5; 9:28 My 5; 9:30 My 5; 10:4 My 19; 13:6 Jl 14; 15:8 S 8; 16:4 S 22; 17:29 O 6; 18:6 O 20; 19:6 N 3; 21:4 D 1; 22:4 D 15
Ackroyd, Peter, 19:14 N 3
Affirmative action, 17:5 O 6
Africa, 3:5 Fe 11; 6:6 Mr 24; 8:8 Ap 21
Aging, 9:9 My 5
Alleva, Richard, 7:6 Ap 7; 7:19 Ap 7; 9:30 My 5; 12:28 Je 16; 12:30 Je 16
Anti-Catholicism, 7:6 Ap 7; 9:29 My 5; 13:6 Jl 14
Apologies, public, 7:5 Ap 7
Arafat, Yasir, 19:6 N 3
Asian Development Bank, 16:13 S 22
Austria, 4:8 Fe 25
Autism, 15:13 S 8
Ayn Rand Institute, 3:6 Fe 11
Barak, Ehud, 19:6 N 3
Baumann, Paul, 1:2 Ja 14; 3:3 Fe 11; 3:6 Fe 11
Belief, 10:7 My 19
Bible, 5:7 Mr 10
Big Bang, 5:7 Mr 10; 6:18 Mr 24
Boy Scouts of America, The, 10:5 My 19; 12:4 Je 16; 13:30 Jl 14; 17:5 O 6
Bradley, Bill, 5:5 Mr 10; 6:9 Mr 24
Browne, Harry, 1:22 Ja 14; 4:4 Fe 25
Burundi, 3:5 Fe 11
Bush, George W., 5:5 Mr 10; 6:9 Mr 24; 9:8 My 5; 16:10 S 22; 17:31 O 6; 18:5 O 20; 18:20 O 20; 21:2 D 1; 21:5 D 1; 21:7 D 1; 21:10 D 1; 22:5 D 15
California redwoods, 6:31 Mr 24
Cambodia, 4:31 Fe 25
Campaign 2000, 1:5 Ja 14; 5:5 Mr 10; 5:8 Mr 10; 6:9 Mr 24; 9:8 My 5; 13:7 Jl 14; 14:5 Au 11; 15:5 S 8; 15:8 S 8; 16:4 S 22; 16:10 S 22; 17:7 O 6; 18:5 O 20; 17:31 O 6; 18:16 O 20; 18:19 O 20; 18:20 O 20; 18:22 O 20; 18:31 O 20; 19:6 N 3; 19:7 N 3; 19:8 N 3; 21:2 D 1; 21:5 D 1; 21:7 D 1; 21:10 D 1; 22:5 D 15
Capital punishment, 4:5 Fe 25; 11:9 Je 2; 17:11 O 6
Casanova, Eugenio Vides, 21:12 D 1
Castro, Fidel, 2:6 Ja 28; 8:5 Ap 21
Catholic church/Catholicism, and
America, 3:12 Fe 11; 3:22 Fe 11; 3:23 Fe 11; 3:31 Fe 11; 4:12 Fe 25; 4:14 Fe 25; 8:12 Ap 21; 8:17 Ap 21; 8:20 Ap 21; 19:47 N 3; 20:12 N 17; 21:31 D 1
apologies, 7:5 Ap 7; 8:38 Ap 21
bishops, 7:16 Ap 7; 8:12 Ap 21; 8:17 Ap 21; 21:4 D 1
collections, 20:31 N 17
conservatism, 15:7 S 8
culture, 6:7 Mr 24; 9:29 My 5
deacons, 15:47 S 8
decentralization, 7:16 Ap 7
dissent, 8:12 Ap 21; 12:30 Je 16
Dominus Iesus, 17:4 O 6; 18:12 O 20; 18:13 O 20; 18:14 O 20; 19:46 N 3; 20:4 N 17; 20:6 N 17; 21:4 D 1; 22:7 D 15
ecumenism, 1:8 Ja 14; 21:31 D 1; 22:7 15
education, 8:12 Ap 21; 8:17 Ap 21; 8:20 Ap 21
error, and, 1:14 Ja 14, 7:5 Ap 7; 8:38 Ap 21

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

evolution, and, 2:7 Ja 28; 2:12 Ja 28; 4:4 Fe 25; 4:29 Fe 11
Ex corde ecclesiae, 8:12 Ap 21; 8:17 Ap 21; 8:20 Ap 21; 19:11 N 3; 21:4 D 1; 22:2 D 15
exorcism, 18:7 O 20
health care, 4:12 Fe 25; 4:14 Fe 25; 8:4 Ap 21; 8:36 Ap 21
history, 1:14 Ja 14
homosexuality, 13:17 Jl 14; 14:2 Au 11; 15:4 S 8; 15:44 S 8; 18:4 O 20; 16:7 S 22; 17:29 O 6; 19:43 N 3; 20:4 N 17
hospitals, 4:12 Fe 25; 4:14 Fe 25; 8:4 Ap 21; 8:36 Ap 21
Humanae vitae, 3:39 Fe 11
identity, 4:12 Fe 25; 8:4 Ap 21; 8:20 Ap 21; 8:36 Ap 21; 11:30 Je 2; 19:11 N 3; 22:2 D 15
interfaith marriage, 2:2 Ja 28; 3:4 Fe 11
Ireland, 5:9 Mr 10
laity, 2:2 Ja 28; 3:4 Fe 11; 3:12 Fe 11; 15:11 S 8; 15:18 S 8; 15:26 S 8; 20:12 N 17
lay preaching, 15:26 S 8; 16:6 S 22; 17:29 O 6
liberal Catholicism, 3:38 Fe 11; 3:39 Fe 11; 15:7 S 8
liturgy, 6:7 Mr 24; 9:29 My 5; 15:22 S 8
marriage, 15:18 S 8; 17:28 O 6; 17:29 O 6
ordination of women, 14:7 Au 11
poetry.com, 20:21 N 17; 22:2 D 15
politics, and, 12:10 Je 16; 14:9 Au 11; 15:5 S 8; 15:8 S 8; 16:31 S 22; 18:16 O 20; 18:19 O 20; 18:20 O 20; 18:22 O 20
Pope John Paul II, 3:2 Fe 11; 4:4 Fe 25; 7:5 Ap 7; 22:12 D 15
Pope John XXIII, 14:6 Au 11; 14:11 Au 11; 14:15 Au 11; 15:45 S 8; 16:4 S 22; 17:4 O 6
Pope Pius IX, 14:6 Au 11; 15:45 S 8; 16:4 S 22; 19:45 N 3
Pope Pius XII, 14:11 Au 11; 21:7 D 1
priesthood, 3:22 Fe 11; 3:23 Fe 11; 3:31 Fe 11; 14:7 Au 11
prison chaplains, 15:11 S 8; 21:4 D 1
reconciliation, sacrament of, 7:11 Ap 7; 10:4 My 19
Scotland, 13:8 Jl 14
seminaries, 3:22 Fe 11; 3:23 Fe 11; 3:31 Fe 11; 5:4 Mr 10; 6:4 Mr 24; 8:4 Ap 21
sexuality, 1:2 Ja 14; 5:9 Mr 10; 15:18 S 8; 19:47 N 3; 21:2 D 15
Slovenia, 14:9 Au 11; 15:45 S 8
social teaching, 4:14 Fe 25; 5:15 Mr 10; 5:19 Mr 10; 19:10 N 3; 21:2 D 1
theology, 1:8 Ja 14; 2:12 Ja 28; 4:4 Fe 25; 4:29 Fe 25; 8:17 Ap 21; 11:2 Je 2; 11:11 Je 2; 11:13 Je 2; 11:14 Je 2; 11:29 Je 2; 22:31 D 15
Tridentine Mass, 15:24 S 8
United States Catholic Conference, 15:11 S 8
universities, 8:12 Ap 21; 8:17 Ap 21; 8:20 Ap 21; 11:30 Je 2; 19:11 N3; 22:2 D 15
Vatican II, 14:11 Au 11; 14:15 Au 11; 15:7 S 8; 17:4 O 6; 17:27 O 6
women, 5:11 Mr 10; 17:6 O 6
year 2000, 1:5 Ja 14; 7:5 Ap 7
Catholic Imagination, The, 9:20 My 5; 11:2 Je 2
Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century, The, 16:26 S 22; 17:28 O 6
Catholic vote, 18:16 O 20; 18:19 O 20; 18:20 O 20; 18:22 O 20
Cell phones, 12:7 Je 16
Chávez, Hugo, 3:11 Fe 11
Cheney, Dick, 18:5 O 20
Children's books, 7:23 Ap 7; 20:23 N 17
Chile, 7:9 Ap 7
Christ as king, 2:2 Ja 28
Church & state, separation, 14:9 Au 11
Cider House Rules, The, 6:5 Mr 24; 8:4 Ap 21; 9:4 My 5
Clinton, administration, 10:4 My 19; 22:12 D 15
Clinton, Hillary, 1:5 Ja 14
Cloning, 2:5 Ja 28
Colombia, 9:5 My 5; 12:4 Je 16; 17:8 O 6
Commonweal, 3:6 Fe 11; 3:39 Fe 11; 4:6 Fe 25; 6:29 Mr 24; 7:19 Ap 7; 7:30 Ap 7; 15:6 S 8
Commonweal Associates, 3:41 Fe 11; 5:6 Mr 10
Commonweal index, 22:25 D 15
Commonweal statement of ownership, 17:30 O 6
Conjoined twins, 18:9 O 20
Courage, 13:19 Jl 14; 15:4 S 8; 15:44 S 8; 17:29 O 6; 18:4 O 20
Cuba, 2:6 Ja 28; 8:5 Ap 21
Curran, Charles, 12:30 Je 16
Dale, James, 10:5 My 19; 12:4 Je 16; 13:30 Jl 14
Darwinism, 2:12 Ja 28; 5:7 Mr 10; 5:43 Mr 10; 5:44 Mr 10; 5:45 Mr 10
Davidson, James D., 2:2 Ja 28; 3:37 Fe 11; 3:38 Fe 11
Dead Man Walking, 17:11 O 6; 17:12 O 6
Death of parents, 13:10 Jl 14
Death penalty, 4:5 Fe 25; 11:9 Je 2
Debt relief, 4:9 Fe 25; 7:30 Ap 7; 22:12 D 15
Democratic party, 12:10 Je 16; 15:8 S 8
Dignity, 13:17 Jl 14; 14:2 Au 11
Divorce, 3:4 Fe 11
Doctrinal development, 20:12 N 17
Donnelly, Daria, 4:6 Fe 25
Donohue, William A., 7:6 Ap 7; 9:28 My 5
Double effect, 11:7 Je 2
Duffy, Eamon, 1:14 Ja 14; 8:38 Ap 21; 13:24 Jl 14; 14:2 Ag 11; 15:4 S 8; 17:4 O 6; 17:27 O 6; 18:4 O 20
Dupuis, Jacques, 19:46 N 3
Education, 8:10 Ap 21; 8:12 Ap 21; 8:17 Ap 21; 8:20 Ap 21; 9:11 My 5; 10:18 My 19; 10:29 My 19; 13:30 Jl 14
Egan, Eileen, 20:6 N 17
Egan, Jack, 5:15 Mr 10; 7:4 Ap 7; 7:30 Ap 7; 9:4 My 5; 11:4 Je 2
El Salvador, 21:12 D 1
End of the Affair, The, 2:18 Ja 28; 9:15 My 5; 12:28 Je 16; 12:30 Je 16
Environment, 6:11 Mr 24; 6:31 Mr 24
Euart, Sharon, 17:6 O 6
Evolution, 2:12 Ja 28; 5:7 Mr 10; 5:43 Mr 10; 5:44 Mr 10; 5:45 Mr 10; 6:28 Mr 24
Forgiveness, 7:5 Ap 7; 7:11 Ap 7; 10:4 My 19; 10:11 My 19
García, José Guillermo, 21:12 D 1
Garvey, John, 19:45 N 3
Gay marriage, 1:9 Ja 14; 3:2 Fe 11; 7:31 Ap 7; 9:4 My 5; 17:5 O 6; 20:4 N 17; 21:6 D 1; 22:4 D 15
Gay rights, 10:5 My 19; 12:4 Je 16; 13:17 Jl 14; 13:30 Jl 14; 17: 5 O 6; 20:4 N 17; 21:6 D 1; 22:4 D 15
Gender, roles, 16:9 S 22
Genetic experimentation, 2:5 Ja 28; 7:7 Ap 7
Germany, 16:11 S 22
Gigot, Paul, 11:6 Je 2
Giuliani, Rudolph, 1:5 Ja 14; 11:6 Je 2
Globalization, 11:15 Je 2; 13:4 Jl 14; 13:29 Jl 14; 16:13 S 22
God, humility of, 2:13 Ja 28; 7:8 Ap 7; 9:4 My 5
González, Elián, 2:6 Ja 28; 8:5 Ap 21
Gore, Al, 5:5 Mr 10; 6:9 Mr 24; 16:10 S 22; 18:5 O 20; 18:19 O 20; 21:2 D 1; 21:5 D 1; 21:7 D 1; 21:10 D1; 22:5 D 15
Gramick, Jeannine, 13:17 Jl 14
Greeley, Andrew, 2:2 Ja 28; 3:4 Fe 11
Guatemala, 12:4 Je 16
Guinness, Alec, 16:19 S 22; 19:4 N 3
Haider, Joerg, 4:8 Fe 25
Haight, Roger, 1:4 Ja 14,
Harry Potter books, 7:23 Ap 7; 9:30 My 5
Hastert, Dennis, 7:6 Ap 7
Healing, and prayer, 8:7 Ap 21; 11:4 Je 2
Health care, 3:8 Fe 11; 4:12 Fe 25; 4:17 Fe 25; 13:31 Jl 14; 15:10 S 8
Hierarchy, 7:16 Ap 7
Higgins, George, 11:4 Je 2; 21:2 D 1
Hillenbrand, Reynold, 5:15 Mr 10; 5:19 Mr 10; 7:4 Ap 7; 7:29 Ap 7; 7:30 Ap 7; 8:37 Ap 21; 9:4 My 5; 11:4 Je 2
HMOs, 4:17 Fe 25; 8:36 Ap 21
Hobson's choice, 1:5 Ja 14; 3:4 Fe 11
Holocaust, 5:41 Mr 10; 8:37 Ap 21; 10:4 My 19; 21:8 D 1
Holy Land, 1:11 Ja 14; 7:5 Ap 7; 22:9 D 15
Homelessness, 1:30 Ja 14
Homosexuality, 10:5 My 19; 12:4 Je 16; 13:30 Jl 14; 17:5 O 6; 19:4 N 3; 19:42 N 3; 19:43 N 3; 19:45 N 3; 20:4 N 17; 21:6 D 1
Hope, 8:6 Ap 21
House chaplain, 7:6 Ap 7
Immigration, 1:7 Ja 14
India, 4:7 Fe 25; 18:8 O 20; 21:30 D 1; 22:8 D 15
Inheritance tax, 13:5 Jl 14
Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies, 11:5 Je 2; 12:6 Je 16; 13:4 Jl 14
Intermarriage, 2:2 Ja 28
Internet, 14:31 Au 11
International Monetary Fund, 11:15, Je 2; 13:4 Jl 14; 13:29 Jl 14; 16:13 S 22; 22:12 D 15
Ireland, 5:9 Mr 10
Israel, 1:11 Ja 14; 7:5 Ap 7; 18:7 O 20; 19:6 N 3; 20:9 N 17; 22:9 D 15
Ivy, 12:31 Je 16
Jerusalem, 1:11 Ja 14; 22:9 D 15
Jesus, 1:4 Ja 14; 2:2 Ja 28; 4:31 Fe 25; 8:39 Ap 21
Joan of Arc, 5:11 Mr 10; 7:4 Ap 7
Jones, Diana Wynne, 9:30 My 5
Joy, Bill, 10:9 My 19
Jury selection, 11:9 Je 2
Kenna, Robert, 6:31 Mr 24
Kennedy, John F., 15:5 S 8
Kosovo, 6:8 Mr 24
Kostunica,Vojislav, 19:5 N 3
Küng, Hans, 17:27 O 6; 19:4 N 3
Kursk, 20:5 N 17
Lawyers, 10:11 My 19
Leahy, Patrick, 12:10 Je 16; 13:30 Jy 14
Lemaitre, Georges, 6:18 Mr 24
Lieberman, Joseph, 15:5 S 8; 16:5 S 22; 16:10 S 22; 17:7 O 6; 17:29 O 6; 18:31 O 20
Lobbying, 3:47 Fe 11
Lopez, Barry, 6:11 Mr 24
MacGill, Sheila, 9:7 My 5
McCain, John, 5:5 Mr 10; 6:9 Mr 24
McCarthy, Abigail, 2:2 Ja 28; 6:29 Mr 24
McCormick, Richard, 5:6 Mr 10
McDermott, Alice, 3:12 Fe 11; 5:4 Mr 10; 11:4 Je 2
McGlynn, Edward, 16:31 S 22
McGowan, Jo, 14:2 Au 11
Mandela, Nelson, 3:5 Fe 11
Men, 9:9 My 5
Message in a Bottle, 12:6 Je 16; 13:4 Jl 14
Mexico, 12:8 Je 16
Migrant workers, 15:47 S 8
Millennium, 1:5 Ja 14; 2:8 Ja 28; 3:9 Fe 11; 5:4 Mr 10; 22:12 D 15
Milosevic, Slobodan, 19:5 N 30
Missile defense, 14:5 Au 11; 16:4 S 22
Mount Saint Mary's Seminary, 3:31 Fe 11; 5:4 Mr 10; 6:4 Mr 24; 8:4 Ap 21
Nader, Ralph, 16:10 S 22; 18:22 O 20
Napster, 14:31 Au 11

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Neuhaus, Richard John, 19:10 N 3; 21:2 D 1
New Ways Ministry, 13:17 Jl 14
Nicol, Alfred, 16:14 S 22; 18:4 O 20
Noonan, John T., 11:5 Je 2; 12:6 Je 16; 20:12 N 17; 22:4 D 15
Noonan, Peggy, 11:6 Je 2
Nuclear submarines, 20:5 N 17
Nugent, Robert, 13:17 Jl 14
O'Connor, John, 10:6 My 19; 11:31 Je 2; 19:10 N 3; 21:2 D 1
O'Gara, Joan, 7:6 Ap 7
Ofili, Chris, 10:23 My 19; 12:4 Je 16
Oregon, 6:11 Mr 24
Original Sin, 2:7 Ja 28
Orthodox Christianity, 22:7 D 15
Pacifism, 20:6 N 17
Palestinians, 1:11 Ja 14; 3:39 Fe 11; 18:7 O 20; 19:6 N 3; 20:9 N 17; 22:9 D 15
Papal Sin, 13:6 Jl 14; 13:24 Jl 14; 14:2 Au 11; 14:4 Au 11; 14:8 Au 11; 15:4 S 8; 15:8 S 8; 15:45 S 8; 17:4 O 6; 18:4 O 22
Patience, 8:6 Ap 21
Perry, Michael, 20:8 N 17
Peru, 4:9 Fe 25; 20:10 N 17
Pinochet, Augusto, 7:9 Ap 7; 16:8 S 22
Porter, Anne, 2:2 Ja 28; 7:26 Ap 7
Porter, Fairfield, 7:26 Ap 7
Portugal, 5:26 Mr 10
Poverty, 1:30 Ja 14; 2:10 Ja 28; 4:7 Fe 25; 4:9 Fe 25; 10:8 My 19; 11:15 Je 2; 12:5 Je 16; 13:4 Jl 14; 13:29 Jl 14; 16:13 S 22; 22:12 D 15; 22:31 D 15
Powell, Anthony, 9:31 My 5
Prayer, 2:31 Ja 28; 8:7 Ap 21
Pregnancy, 10:31 My 19
Prejean, Helen, 17:11 O 6
Prep schools, 10:18 My 19; 13:30 Jl 14
Proposition 22, 7:31 Ap 7; 9:4 My 5
Religion and politics, 16:5 S 22; 16:31 S 22; 17:7 O 6; 18:16 O 20; 18:31 O 20; 19:7 N 3; 19:45 N 3; 20:8 N 17; 21:2 D 1
Republican party, 15:8 S 8
Romero, Oscar, 3:2 Fe 11; 4:4 Fe 25
Roncalli, Angelo Giuseppe, 14:11 Au 11; 14:15 Au 11
Ruddy, Christopher, 8:17 Ap 21; 11:4 Je 2; 11:11 Je 2; 11:13 Je 2; 11:14 Je 2; 11:29 Je 2
RU-486, 18:6 O 20
Rwanda, 3:5 Fe 11
Ryan, George, 4:5 Fe 25
Scientific research, 2:5 Ja 28
Scotland, 13:8 Jl 14
Secularism, 2:8 Ja 28; 5:4 Mr 10
'Sensation' exhibit, 10:23 My 19; 12:4 Je 16
Serbia, 6:8 Mr 24
Singer, Peter, 6:28 Mr 24
Sintra Museum, 5:26 Mr 10
Skillin, Edward, 15:6 S 8; 16:4 S 22; 18:4 O 20
Slovenia, 14:9 Au 11; 15:45 S 8
Sudan, 6:6 Mr 24; 9:28 My 5
Supreme Court, 10:5 My 19; 11:9 Je 2; 22:5 D 15
Tax cuts, 9:8 My 5; 13:7 Jl 14
Taylor, Ruth E., 22:6 D 15
Teacher evaluations, 8:10 Ap 21; 10:29 My 19
Teaching, 9:11 My 5
Technology, 10:9 My 19
Television, 17:17 O 6
Thatcher, Margaret, 16:8 S 22
Theology of nature, 2:12 Ja 28; 5:7 Mr 10; 6:11 Mr 24; 7;4 Ap 7
Under the Rose, 1:22 Ja 14; 4:4 Fe 25
Unions, 19:8 N 3; 19:10 N 3; 21:2 D 1
United States,
  Cuba, 2:6 Ja 28; 8:5 Ap 21
  culture, 10:9 My 19; 18:8 O 20; 21:6 D 1; 21:30 D 1
  domestic issues, 1:6 Ja 14; 2:10 Ja 28; 3:8 Fe 11; 6:28 Mr 24; 9:8 My 5; 10:8 My 19; 12:5 Je 16; 13:4 Jl 14; 13:7 Jl 14; 13:31 Jl 14; 14:5 Au 11; 17:5 O 6; 19 4 N 3; 19:42 N 3; 19:43 N 3; 19:45 N 3; 19:8 N 3; 20:4 N 17; 21:6 D 1
  foreign policy, 2:6 Ja 28; 8:5 Ap 21; 3:9 Fe 11; 9:5 My 5; 12:4 Je 16; 14:5 Au 11; 17:8 O 6; 21:12 D 1
  politics, 3:47 Fe 11; 6:9 Mr 24; 9:8 My 5; 12:10 Je 16; 16:5 S 22; 16:10 S 22; 18:5 O 20; 18:16 O 20; 18:19 O 20; 18:20 O 20; 18:22 O 20: 21:5 D 1; 21:10 D 1
United States Postal Service, 22:6 D 15
Venezuela, 3:11 Fe 11
Vouchers, school, 5:8 Mr 10
Weigel, George, 1:2 Ja 14; 3:2 Fe 11; 4:4 Fe 25
'West Wing, The,' 5:47 Mr 10; 9:30 My 5; 19:22 N 3
Williams, Michael, 3:6 Fe 11
Wills, Garry, 13:6 Jl 14; 13:24 Jl 14; 14:2 Au 11; 14:4 Au 11; 14:8 Au 8; 15:4 S 8; 15:8 S 8; 17:4 O 6; 18:5 O 20
Wilson, E.O., 6:28 Mr 24
Women's Ordination Conference, 14:7 Au 11
World Bank, 11:15 Je 2; 13:4 Jl 14; 13:29 Jl 14; 16:13 S 22; 22:12 D 15
World Trade Organization, 11:15 Je 2; 13:4 Jl 14; 13:29 Jl 14; 16:13 S 22
Writing, 3:12 Fe 11; 9:11 My 5
Young Christian Students, 5:15 Mr 10
Young Christian Workers, 5:15 Mr 10; 8:37 Ap 21
Young theologians, 8:17 Ap 21; 11:4 Je 2; 11:11 Je 2; 11:13 Je 2; 11:14 Je 2; 11:29 Je 2
Yugoslavia, 19:5 N 3
Zimbabwe, 8:8 Ap 21

Art, by Robert Murray Davis

Loosening up ..... 5:26 Mr 10

Art, by Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Jacob Lawrence ..... 13:22 Jl 14
Sensation ..... 10:23 My 19

Culture Watch, by Richard Alleva

Cheaper than crack ..... 17:17 O 6
On screen, Bill's better self ..... 19:22 N 3
Quadrants & quality ..... 21:16 D 1

Exhibit, by Elizabeth Kirkland Cahill

Nowhere is everywhere ..... 21:18 D 1

Media, by Michael O. Garvey

Jesus ..... 9:17 My 5

Media, by Celia Wren

Action ..... 1:20 Ja 14
David Copperfield ..... 7:21 Ap 7
Masterpiece Theatre ..... 18:25 O 20
Poetry.com ..... 20:21 N 17
Sopranos, The ..... 2:20 Ja 28
Survivor ..... 14:18 Au 11
War in Heaven ..... 6:20 Mr 24

Music, by Benjamin Ivry

Nearly good as Gould ..... 20:20 N 17
Faithful heir ..... 22:17 D 15

Screen, by Richard Alleva

Cradle Will Rock ..... 5:21 Mr 10
End of the Affair, The ..... 2:18 Ja 28
Green Mile, The ..... 4:19 Fe 25
Insider, The ..... 1:18 Ja 14
Talented Mr. Ripley, The ..... 3:20 Fe 11
Topsy-Turvy ..... 5:22 Mr 10

Screen, by Paul Baumann

End of the Affair, The ..... 9:15 My 5
Gladiator ..... 11:20 Je 2
Keeping the Faith ..... 11:19 Je 2
Mission: Impossible 2 ..... 13:20 Jl 14
Nurse Betty ..... 17:19 O 6
Saving Grace ..... 17:20 O 6
Small Time Crooks ..... 13:20 Jl 14
Shower ..... 15:28 S 8
Space Cowboys ..... 15:28 S 8
Virgin Suicides, The ..... 11:20 Je 2

Screen, by Rand Richards Cooper

Almost Famous ..... 18:23 O 20
American Psycho ..... 10:21 My 19
Bless the Child ..... 16:17 S 22
Boiler Room ..... 8:24 Ap 21
Boys Don't Cry ..... 8:25 Ap 21
Chuck and Buck ..... 16:18 S 22
Color of Paradise, The ..... 12:16 Je 16
Contender, The ..... 20:19 N 17
Croupier ..... 14:17 Au 14
Dancer in the Dark ..... 19:20 N 3
How the Grinch Stole Christmas ..... 22:15 D 15
Get Carter ..... 19:21 N 3
Girlfight ..... 20:18 N 17
High Fidelity ..... 10:22 My 19
Two Family House ..... 22:16 D 15
Winter Sleepers ..... 14:17 Au 11

Stage, by Celia Wren

Copenhagen ..... 12:17 Je 16
Donkey Show, The ..... 4:21 Fe 25
Real Thing, The ..... 12:18 Je 16

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MOTOWN MOSES

Peter Feuerherd

Detroit both fascinates and repels.

I was introduced to Motown about a decade ago. I had occasion to live and work there for a year. Yet, much like most of those who claim to be from there, I didn't actually live in Detroit. I lived instead in one of its more nondescript suburbs near a Ford plant that buzzed with three shifts spewing out Escorts.

My family and I had been warned. "You don't want to live *there*," our Michigan friends told us in hushed warnings about their state's largest city.

I worked downtown and would tell them about various hangouts in the city I had discovered. These included a skating rink at Hart Plaza, the waterfront at Belle Isle, and the hole-in-the-wall sports bar where Yankees manager Billy Martin was said to have once punched out a marshmallow salesman, or maybe it was a relief pitcher. I might as well have told them about a trip to Siberia for all they knew—or cared—about what lurked downtown.

During my time there, the archdiocese would be torn apart by a plan to close many city parishes. That fight pitted activists quoting church documents on a liberating Jesus who professed a preferential option for the poor against church officials who warned that business-as-usual was impossible and that change had to happen. There was intense rancor laced with a heavy pall of guilt as well. Many of the middle-class activists had left the city years ago and commuted to their old parishes in the city. Detroit's abandonment cut across all kinds of lines.

As luck would have it, after a decade away, work took me back for a short visit to report on a conference.

I got there early and had time to walk around a city built on the automobile, where pedestrians remain scarce.

Media accounts note that the Detroit metro area, unlike ten years ago, is booming. Unemployment is officially down to almost zero. The SUV has revitalized the auto business beyond the wildest expectations. But that prosperity is not seen much in the city itself.

One is struck by the abandoned buildings: not only in poverty-scarred residential areas, filled with empty lots and crumbling shells that never recovered from the riots of the '60s, but also in the heart of downtown. Other cities—notably New York and Los Angeles—had riots, but few left the long-standing legacies one finds in the eerie emptiness of Detroit. Massive buildings, such as the old Cadillac Hotel, were empty ten years ago. They are still empty, nestled in the heart of a battered downtown. Old department stores are empty hulks; the shoppers prefer the malls out of town. Many of the buildings, at the time of my visit, were plastered with ominous orange signs warning the revelers of "Devil's Night"—a Halloween ritual when Detroit's abandoned buildings are set ablaze—to stay away.

Even other hard-scrabble American cities—Baltimore and its waterfront comes to mind—have little theme-park type sections filled with tourists in which urban blight can seem as far removed as it is in a typical suburban mall. Little of that façade exists in Detroit.

Still, there are signs of a fledgling revival.

Near the riverfront are imposing corporate structures. They include the massive, self-enclosed Renaissance Center, now occupied by General Motors, its name a remnant of the glossy dream of urban renewal it once promised.

The city fathers seem in desperate search of quick economic fixes. Casinos now dot the city, a gleaming new baseball stadium opened last year next to a new opera house, and, in a place infamous for dirt-cheap real estate, $200,000 town homes are now sprouting on Woodward Avenue, one of Detroit's main drags. The new homes sit uneasily just blocks from row upon row of abandoned houses and garbage-strewn vacant lots.

I travel via taxi from my hotel to the conference. As soon as I get out of my cab, I am hit for money by a man named Reggie. I give him five dollars, not as an act of charity but as a spontaneous response to a perceived shakedown. The neighborhood made middle-class me uncomfortable.

At the meeting, I heard of a Jesus who might fit in very well in today's Detroit: the prophet of Luke 4:16–30, who came to preach good news to the poor and was run out of his hometown and almost killed for his efforts. The middle-class activists in attendance were told to be like Moses: people of modest means intent on liberating the oppressed who have nothing.

It was language anyone in church circles has heard for years. Yet, almost anywhere else in today's prosperous America, it would appear out of place. On the streets of Detroit, largely untouched by that wealth, it speaks to necessity. In other places, preachers can revert to various models of a therapeutic, cuddly Jesus obsessed with personal, rather than social, ills. Here that would sound ridiculous.

In Detroit, there is no pretending. The reality of the streets are too jarring to embrace any other Jesus than the one who is consumed with social salvation and finds trouble for his efforts. It remains a place where economic progress lags. But the theology you can find there may be as fine-tuned as anything coming out of its auto factories. □

Peter Feuerherd *is a frequent* Commonweal *contributor.*

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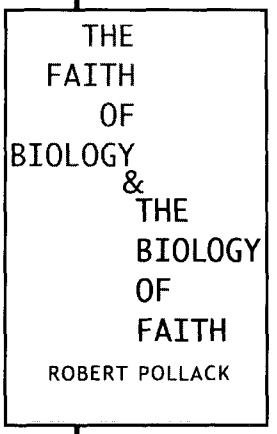

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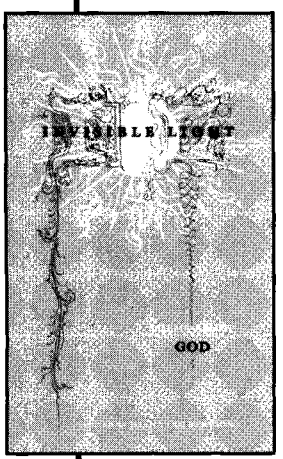

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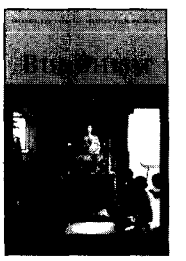

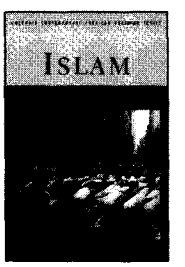

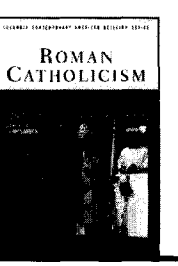

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